

Taming the Tongue

James 3:1-12

THRIVE! Growing and Changing in the Christian Life

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livinghopechurch.net

“God has given us two ears, but one tongue, to show that we should be swift to hear, but slow to speak. God has set a double fence before the tongue, the teeth and the lips, to teach us to be wary that we offend not with our tongue.”

– Thomas Watson

Announcements

1. Welcome to visitors / welcome packet
2. No expositor’s class today, but we do have 5pm service.
3. Sunday School Marriage Enrichment Class in the Spring, sign up if you are interested

*I*f you don’t have a Bible, there should be one in the seat in front of you. Open your Bible to **James 3** The title of our message this morning is “Taming the Tongue.”

Story of Larry Huddle

I’ll never forget the day. Beautiful summer day. My best friend Ralph Castine and I found a pile of wood behind the Scarlet Oak Elementary School by our house. We thought it would make great wood for a tree house. As we were figuring out how to transport it two blocks to our neighborhood, Larry Huddle and his gang showed up and declared it was his wood. Now I’m 9 years old at the time. Larry and his gang are all younger teenagers. Ralph and I wouldn’t give in. Finders keepers.

Larry’s gang grabbed me and Ralph ran to get help. Even though in about five minutes there were several older teenagers towering over Larry and his gang to protect us, it was too late. In the time Ralph was gone the gang held me down and took a sling shot and put a rock in my eye.

I’ve had eye troubles ever since. I used to think about that day. What if I never would have went to the school that summer day? What if I would have gone home a different way.

Have you ever had something you wish you could erase from your memory?

Can’t Erase Words

Words are something you can’t erase. We talk constantly. Incessantly. The average person speaks 16,000 words a day. The first words were spoken by God, and the result was very powerful – God formed the universe by words. All words are God’s words, and so we must give

an account for how we use them. Jesus said: “Every idle word will be brought into account at the day of Judgment.”

Reading of Holy Scripture

James 3:1-12, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. 3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 4 Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.”

James states in **James 3:8**, “No human being can tame the tongue.”

Augustine said, “... he does not say that no one can tame the tongue, but no one of men; so that when it is tamed we confess that this is brought about by the pity, the help, the grace of God.”¹

Counseling: Life and Death is in the Power of the Tongue

Words can give life or destroy. The words spoken to us form us. I also have sat with people who are thirty-five, forty-five, or fifty years old who’ll talk to me about horrible things that their mom and dad or loved one said to them decades ago. When they begin to recount the ugly words of yesteryear, they’ll weep as if it happened yesterday. In these moments, I’m confronted again with the scary, painful, long-term shelf life of ugly, hateful, abusive talk.

On the other hand, what’s more exciting than waiting for a child to speak his or her first words? Little Jimmy toddles into the room and he goes blu-blah-blah-blah. And Dad says to his wife, “I think he said ‘Da da.’ I’m sure. I’m sure it was ‘Da da.’”

Well, it was probably just gas, but the parents are expectant and excited because Jimmy is on the cusp of something that is magnificently human—he is getting ready to talk!²

A Difficult Indictment

So important is it that you get your tongue tamed and under control, James warns: **James 1:26**: “If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.”

If you don’t get your tongue under control, James says you deceive yourself, and your attempts at the Christian life are an exercise in futility.

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 127.

² Paul Tripp. *War of Words*, 25.

The Power of Words

*A careless word may kindle strife;
 A cruel word may wreck a life.
 A bitter word may hate instill;
 A brutal word may smite and kill.
 A gracious word may smooth the way;
 A joyous word may light the day.
 A timely word may lessen stress;
 A loving word may heal and bless.*

Author Unknown³

The Power of Our Words

Those who study words tell us that words are important. But one study says how we use those words is even more important. In fact, the researchers concluded that all our communication consists of:

- 7% Words
- 38% Tones
- 55% Non-Verbal Actions

Proverbs: A Treatise on Talk

Paul Tripp calls the book of Proverbs: “a treatise on talk.” I would summarize it this way: words give life; words bring death—you choose. We need to realize the power of our words.

Words Paint Pictures

Words paint pictures. What kind of picture would the totality of your words paint? The right words spoken at the right time can give a person a picture of encouragement to gaze at. “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (Proverbs 25:11).

Out of the Heart

James tells us in **James 3:8**, that “no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.” It is true no human being can tame their own tongue. So if you are looking to yourself, you’ll never do it. God though can indeed tame your tongue. God tames the tongue by taming your heart.

Outline

A Strategy for Glorifying God with your Communication

- The **problem**: James 1:1-12.
- The **source**: Luke 6:43-45.
- The **damage**: various scriptures.
- The **solution**: 2 Peter 1:3-4.

³ Pegues, Deborah Smith (2005-04-01). 30 Days to Taming Your Tongue (p. 132). Harvest House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

I. **The Problem: Our Big Mouth is a Great Weapon**, James 1:1-12.

James 3:1–12 contains the single most sustained discussion in the New Testament on the use of the tongue. I take the author of this little book to have been James, the half-brother of our Lord Jesus.⁴

the immediate focus of James’s teaching—one might say the same of all apostolic teaching—is to bring Christian believers to maturity. Here, as well as in other places, he is completely in harmony with the way the apostle Paul employed all his God-given powers: “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Col. 1:28–29).

We find that this theme runs through the entire book. As we come upon it in chapter 3, he has already shown (1) how spiritual maturity develops through response to suffering, and (2) how spiritual maturity is enhanced by response to the Word. Now he goes on to show that (3) spiritual maturity is evidenced by the use of the tongue.

A Note of Caution

James 3:1, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”

Why did James think it necessary to include this caution? He was warning his readers about the terrible possibility of taking up the task of teaching with the wrong motive.⁵

Words are important. Being a teacher is to have a ministry of words. Here in Jerusalem we had churches filled with teachers who knew the Bible well. But were they teachers who guarded their tongues. It seems they struggled with that.

Don’t we all struggle with speaking in a way that pleases God?

THE TONGUE’S INTRINSIC POWER

A Note of Realism

James 3:2a, “For we all stumble in many ways.” We all stumble don’t we? Especially with our tongues. How many times a day do we give off a bad attitude? It’s not like we are planning on it. We “stumble.” It takes us by surprise. Don’t be taken by surprise.

A Note of Hope

James 3:2b, “And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.”

If you can control your tongue, it is a sign of fantastic Christian maturity. The word ‘perfect’ refers to maturity. James was saying that those who control their speech are well on the way to spiritual maturity.

⁴ Sinclair Ferguson notes: “The author does not identify himself beyond revealing that he is “James” (1:1). The view of the earliest church tradition is that this is James the half-brother of the Lord, and this is certainly in accord with what evidence of authorship there is in the letter, and of what we know of James.”

⁵ Ellsworth, R. (2009). *Opening up James* (p. 104). Leominster: Day One Publications.

Horses Bits

Look how powerful the tongue is. James compares controlling your tongue to controlling a horse. **James 3:3**, “If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well.”

The horse is an incredibly powerful animal. Take 550 pounds (as much as a puffing Olympic heavyweight lifter can hoist overhead), set it on a horse’s back, and it will barely snort as it stands breathing easily under the burden. The same horse, unburdened, can sprint a quarter-mile in about twenty-five seconds. A horse is half a ton of raw power! Yet, place a bridle and bit in its mouth and a 100-pound woman on its back who knows what she is doing and the animal can literally be made to dance.⁶

Ship’s Rudder

James observed the same phenomenon in ancient ships, as ships small and large were steered by an amazingly small rudder.

James 3:4, “Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.”

The USS Zumwalt is the largest destroyer ever built for the US Navy. The 610-foot, 15,000-ton behemoth has begun sea trials before joining the US fleet some time in 2016. Its price tag of \$4.4 billion (£2.9 billion) is almost as astounding as its bulk.

So advanced are the Zumwalt's stealth capabilities, that it registers on radar as a small vessel, about the size of a fishing boat. It is about 100ft longer and 20ft wider than the navy's current class of destroyers. Its computer-guided missile system can hit targets up to 63 miles away, and it will eventually be equipped with laser weapons. And yet it is still controlled by a rudder. He who controls the rudder controls the ship.

Bruce Waltke Quote

So it is with the tongue. The tongue is small. But its power, both for good and for ill, is out of all proportion to its size. Old Testament Theologian Bruce Waltke wryly notes: “A fool’s tongue is long enough to cut his own throat.”⁷

Words are powerful!

Proverbs 18:21, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue...”

Gracious, kind words are powerful!

Proverbs 16:24, “Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.”

Rash words are powerful!

Proverbs 12:18, “There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

Self-controlled words are powerful!

Proverbs 15:1, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

⁶ Hughes, R. K. (2001). *Disciplines of a godly man* (10th anniversary ed.; rev. ed., p. 136). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15, NICOT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 102.

The Tongue of the Learned

Have you been schooled in how to build people up with your language? You can help or hurt people with even your tone of voice.

“The Lord God has given Me
The tongue of the learned,
That I should know how to speak
A word in season to him who is weary.” (Isaiah 50:4 NKJV).

God must give us the tongue of the learned. Are you educated when it comes to our tongues.

THE TONGUE’S DESTRUCTIVE POWER

James’ principal concern is with the destructive power of the tongue.

James 3:5b-6, “How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, **staining the whole body**, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.”

Mrs. O’Leary’s Cow & the North Woods

The tongue has awesome potential for harm, as the forest fire analogy suggests. At 9:00 one Sunday evening, October 8, 1871, poor Mrs. O’Leary’s cow kicked over the lantern as she was being milked, starting the great Chicago Fire. That disaster destroyed three and one half miles of the city, destroying over 17,000 buildings before it was checked by gunpowder explosions on the south line of the fire. The fire lasted two days and cost over 250 lives.

North Woods. But ironically that was not the greatest inferno in the Midwest that year. Historians tell us that on the same day that dry autumn a spark ignited a raging fire in the North Woods of Wisconsin, a blaze which burned for an entire month, taking more lives than the Chicago Fire. A veritable firestorm destroyed billions of yards of precious timber — all from one spark!⁸

The Tongue Stains the Whole Body of Living

What is the effect of the tongue’s cosmic wickedness? It “stains the whole body” (6a) – the idea is that “it corrupts the whole person.” Vs. 6b, “setting on fire the entire course of life.” The words we say can take over our human life or existence. What a true experience! About nine-tenths of the flames we experience in our lives come from the tongue.⁹

Someone’s tongue can leave you bitter and burn you down for days, months, years...even a life time.

Fueled by Hell

Having grabbed our imaginations with his graphic language, James adds the final touch: “and is itself set on fire by hell.” Here the language means *continually* set on fire. James used the same word for Hell that his brother Jesus used — “*Gehenna*” — derived from the perpetually burning garbage dump outside Jerusalem, a place of fire and filth where, as Jesus said, “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48).

⁸ Hughes, 137.

⁹ Ibid, 138.

Can anyone miss the point? The uncontrolled tongue has a direct pipeline to Hell! Fueled by Hell, it burns our lives with its filthy fires. But it is also, as Calvin says, an "... instrument for catching, encouraging, and increasing the fires of hell."¹⁰

The Tongue like a Spider's Melting Venom

Taking James' words seriously, we recognize that the tongue has more destructive power than a hydrogen bomb, for the bomb's power is physical and temporal, whereas the tongue is spiritual and eternal. **Walter Wangerin**, in his collection of short stories *Ragman and Other Cries of Faith*, turns to Nature for a chilling metaphor of the tongue's power. He explains:

"A female spider is often a widow for embarrassing reasons — she regularly eats those who come her way. Lonely suitors and visitors alike quickly become corpses, and her dining room is a morgue. A visiting fly, having become captive, will appear to be whole, but the spider has drunk his insides so that he has become his own hollow casket." Not a pleasant thought, especially if you have a touch of arachnophobia, as I do!

The reason for this macabre procedure is that she has no stomach and so is incapable of digesting anything within her. Through tiny punctures she injects her digestive juices into a fly so that his insides are broken down and turned into warm soup. "This soup she swills," says Wangerin, "even as most of us swill souls of one another after having cooked them in various enzymes: guilt, humiliations, subjectivities, cruel love — there are a number of fine, acidic mixes. And some among us are so skilled with the hypodermic word that our dear ones continue to sit up and to smile, quite as though they were still alive."¹¹

Soul Suckers

Are your words giving life to souls or are you melting souls and sucking souls out of people by your words? Words do not dissolve mere organs and nerves but **souls!** This world is populated by walking human caskets because countless lives have been dissolved and sucked empty by another's words.¹²

THE TONGUE'S SOURCE REVEALED

James' now makes the most important point: whatever comes out of the mouth unfailingly reveals what is on the inside.

James 3:9-12, "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water."

He is saying, "Be honest. Are you skilled in your religious vocabulary so that at church you appear holy and good, but at home you are sarcastic with your family and critical of others?" What about us? Do we enjoy the gossipy tidbits that come our way at the office, and even pass on a few ourselves? What do we laugh at or about? How do we respond to others? Would the answers to these questions give the lie to our profession of love for God?

¹⁰ John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke Volume III and the Epistle of James and Jude*, trans. A. W. Morrison (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 291.

¹¹ Walter Wangerin, Jr., *Ragman and Other Cries of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 26.

¹² Hughes, 138.

Who Can Tame the Tongue?

Verse 8: No human can tame the tongue. But as Augustine said, “God can tame the tongue.”

II. **The Source: Our mouth is fueled by the Heart**, Luke 6:43–45.

As James says, in order to tame the tongue, we must do heart surgery.

The Weapon’s Storage Tank

Luke 6:43–45, “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, 44 for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. 45 The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

There is no escaping the message of this Scripture: word problems are heart problems.

Hear this: we are what we speak. We can be an instrument of life or death with our tongues. We can be like a police officer or a terrorist. Which are you?

What does the Bible mean when it uses that word heart? The Bible essentially divides you into two pieces—your outer man and your inner man. The outer man is your physical self. It’s the house God has given you for your heart while you are here on earth. You could call your body your earth suit. The Bible uses many words for the inner man: mind, emotion, soul, spirit, will. These words are all summarized by a big-basket term—heart. This term is used in almost a thousand passages of Scripture.

It’s one of the most well-developed themes in all of the Bible. When the Bible uses the term heart, it means the causal core of your personhood. The heart is your directional system. The heart is your steering wheel.

The Principle of Organic Consistency

Jesus is teaching what we might call (via Paul Tripp) the “principle of organic consistency.” What we really are in our hearts will most certainly come out of our mouths.

Jesus uses agriculture to teach this principle. What’s the best way to recognize an apple tree? Obviously—apples. But when you look at those apples, you instinctively know that the tree you’re looking at is apple-istic all the way down to its roots. If there wasn’t apple DNA in its roots, it wouldn’t grow apples as fruit. You will never, ever plant peach pits and get apples. Now, don’t miss the profound point that Christ is making here. He is teaching the principle of organic consistency. There is an organic consistency between what’s in our hearts and what comes out of our mouths.”

Apple Tree with False Fruit

Let’s go back to the tree. Pretend with me that I have an apple tree in my backyard and it simply won’t bear good fruit. Every year it just produces hard, brown, inedible apples. What should I do?

I could living fruit to the tree it may look alive for a little bit, but the tree is still dead. Fake fruit does not make a tree live.

Superficial Change

Let me apply this powerful physical picture to our world of talk. I am convinced that much of what we do in an attempt to change our communication is nothing more or less than apple nailing. It has no energy to understand and confess the war for the heart that lies beneath the war of words. People aren't my problem. Situations are not my problem. Circumstances are not my problem. Locations are not my problem. My problem is in my heart. It's only when you and I stand before our Redeemer and are humbly willing to say, regardless of the flawed people that you live with and the fallen world that is your address, that you are your greatest communication problem, that you are heading in a direction of fundamental biblical change in your world of talk.

Confession

Are you prepared to make this essential confession with me: "I am my greatest communication problem. The greatest difficulty, the greatest danger, and the everyday traps of communication that we all fall into all exist inside of me, not outside of me."

III. The **Damage**: How the Tongue Destroys, Proverbs 18:8.

Verbal Poison

Significantly, James does not tell us how the tongue's destructive power is manifested in human speech. He knows that the spiritual mind, informed by the Scriptures, will have no problem in making the connections.

We often cover our language by renaming it. Imagine if you had children's medicine in the cabinet and you stored your poison next to it. That would be terrible. And imagine if the bottles looked the same and you didn't use labels.

We need to clearly call sin what it is: sin. So let's look at the ways we destroy our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and do something about it.

GOSSIP

Solomon wisely observed, "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down into a man's inmost parts" (Proverbs 18:8). Gossip is greedily picked up and stored away by the hearers like tasty tidbits.

Do you sometimes engage in idle and often malicious talk about the personal affairs of another? Gossip can be such a delectable "choice morsel" that many find it impossible to resist. Now, I'm certain everyone hearing this message has been guilty of partaking of this popular pastime—either as a bearer or a hearer at one time or another. Oh, the downside of such behavior!

Gossip often veils itself in acceptable conventions such as

- "Have you heard ... ?" or
- "Did you know ... ?" or
- "They tell me ..." or
- "Keep this to yourself, but...." or
- "I do not believe it is true, but I heard that ..." or
- "I wouldn't tell you, except that I know it will go no further."

- Of course, the most infamous such rationalization in Christian circles is, “I am telling you this so you can pray.”

This seems so pious, but the heart that feeds on hearing evil reports is a tool of Hell, and it leaves flaming fires in its wake. Oh, the heartache that comes from the tongue.¹³

What’s the solution? How do you stop gossiping? Catch yourself before you indulge!

1 – Realize you are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Why are you willing to use the temple of God as a “trash receptacle” by being a receiver of gossip?

Is this the only way you know how to establish camaraderie with others? Do you need to be the center of attention? Does it make you feel superior to know something negative about somebody that the hearer doesn’t know? Are you envious of your subject’s accomplishments?

2 – Put a guard on your mouth. Psalm 141:3, “Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!”

3 – Go to the source. If someone has gossip, you tell them to go directly to the source. You are offended by someone. Go directly to that person.

Matthew 18:15, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.”

Matthew 5:23–24, “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

Go right away. Reconcile quickly. Don’t ask advice. Go right to the person. You say, well if I’m not right with someone I can’t come to the service. No! You should never neglect a service. That’s the point. Go before the service and reconcile.

4 – THINK before you speak! Missionary Amy Carmichael said we need to use this test before we speak...

- T (True) Is it True?
- H (Helpful) Is it Helpful?
- I (Inspiring) Is it Inspiring?
- N (Necessary) Is it Necessary?
- K (Kind) Is it Kind?

T (True) Is it True?

Did you observe or experience first-hand what you might share? Are you making assumptions about what is true? Did you hear it second-hand. Do you have your facts correct? Are you exaggerating, minimizing or spinning the truth?

H (Helpful) Is it Helpful?

Is my desire to be entertained or to edify? Is my motive to gain favor or to edify. If that person were here would I still say it?

I (Inspiring) Is it Inspiring?

Is it meant to bring hope to someone that you are sharing this? Or are you trying to shame the person?

¹³ Hughes, 139.

N (Necessary) Is it Necessary?

How important is this for you to communicate? Sometimes we say, “Well I’m just getting advice,” and we hurt the person behind their back. The most important thing is that the person grows and changes.

K (Kind) Is it Kind?

Are you lifting a burden for the person?

If we take an example of gossip all the way through these four filters, we see that often gossip isn’t true, kind, necessary or the right timing.

FLATTERY

Gossip involves saying behind a person’s back what you would never say to his or her face. Flattery means saying to a person’s face what you would never say behind his or her back. The motive is to use the person and gain favor by lying to their face.

The Scriptures warn us repeatedly against flatterers, for they are destructive people who carry a legion of unwholesome motives: “Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet” (Proverbs 29:5). “A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin” (Proverbs 26:28). “May the Lord cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue that says, ‘We will triumph with our tongues ...’” (Psalm 12:3, 4).¹⁴

CRITICISM

Fault-finding seems endemic to the Christian Church. Perhaps this is because a taste of righteousness can be easily perverted into an overweening sense of self-righteousness and judgmentalism.

Once while John Wesley was preaching, he noticed a lady in the audience who was known for her critical attitude. All through the service she sat and stared at his new tie. When the meeting ended, she came up to him and said very sharply, “Mr. Wesley, the strings on your tie are much too long. It’s an offense to me!” He asked if any of the ladies present happened to have a pair of scissors in their purse. When the scissors were handed to him, he gave them to his critic and asked her to trim the streamers to her liking. After she clipped them off near the collar, he said, “Are you sure they’re all right now?” “Yes, that’s much better.” “Then let me have those shears a moment,” said Wesley. “I’m sure you wouldn’t mind if I also gave you a bit of correction. I must tell you, madam, that your tongue is an offense to me — it’s too long! Please stick it out ... I’d like to take some off.”

On another occasion someone said to Wesley, “My talent is to speak my mind.” Wesley replied, “That’s one talent God wouldn’t care a bit if you buried!” This is good advice for all Christians.¹⁵

SELF DEPRECIATION

Moses said to the LORD, “O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue” (Exodus 4:10).

You engage in self-deprecation when you think or speak of yourself as being of little or no worth and thereby minimize the value of what you “bring to the table” or have to offer.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Self-deprecation is often disguised as humility; but in reality, it is a rejection of the Word of God, which assures us we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (PHILIPPIANS 4:13).

Self-deprecation displeases God. When Moses complained that he was inadequate to lead the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage because of his speech impediment, God became upset. The LORD said to him, “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say” (Exodus 4:11-12).

Instead, have the attitude of Paul: **2 Cor. 12:9**, “But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

LYING

John says in Rev. 21:8, “All liars will be cast into the Lake of Fire.” Paul says on numerous occasions: “No liar will enter the kingdom of heaven.” Solomon says: “The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful” (Pro. 12:22).

Peter warns us, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech” (1 Pet. 3:10). Why do some people practice deception? Many do it for financial gain, for social advantage, to hide immoral acts, or to obtain other “benefits.” Jacob, whose name meant “trickster,” conspired with his mother and deceived his father into giving him the birthright blessing that belonged to his brother Esau (Gen. 27).

Number 32:23, “Be sure your sin will find you out.” Your sin will always catch up with you.

You might say, “It’s just a half truth.” Well a half truth is a whole lie! You might say “it’s just a bit of exaggeration.” Even the world takes that seriously. Brian Williams, former anchor of NBC news knows that now.

Proverbs 8:7-8, “or my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
⁸ All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.”

100% WORDS

One form of exaggeration are – 100% words such as “always,” “never,” “everyone” can often mean that we are exaggerating. For example: “You never help me with the dishes.” “You always leave your socks in the middle of the room.” “Everyone agrees with me.”

So Much More

We could speak of so much more, but we have no time.

IV. The Solution, 2 Peter 1:3-4.

Everything You Need

Do you look at the people in your life in the situations and location in which you live and think there is no way you will be able to love people in that way or live up to God’s standard and according to his design? Well, this final passage is for you. I want to encourage you with the words of 2 Peter 1. This passage is my friend. I don’t know what I would do without these words:

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us [by] his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises [the Word of God], so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Pet. 1:3–4)

“His divine power has granted . . .” If you’re a grammarian, what’s the tense of the verb? It’s past perfect, a definitive action in the past with continuing results in the future. Therefore, if you are God’s child, then what’s promised is already in your storehouse. This is not a promise of what could be. This is a redemptive is; a statement of what is already yours. “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.” Or as the NIV says, “everything we need for life and godliness.”

Life and Godliness

Peter uses two words: life and godliness. God’s given you everything for life here and now and the life to come. Godliness is a word that we might say is a “habituated life of Christ-likeness.”

THREE SOLUTIONS FOR A TRANSFORMED TONGUE

Sinclair Ferguson gives three solutions for a transformed tongue.

1) Realize the pollution of your tongue reveals your need for grace.

Grace is the answer from beginning to end. It is nowhere more starkly illustrated than in the experience of Isaiah. There is no more powerful passage in the Old Testament than Isaiah 6.

Isaiah sees God on His throne and suddenly, everything around Isaiah seems to be disintegrating. Everything within him seems to come apart. He is “lost,” or “ruined” (Isa. 6:5). The language expresses the stunned silence felt in the presence of major disaster or death.⁹ This is Isaiah’s “twin towers” day, the 9/11 moment in his spiritual experience. From his assumed security he had pronounced six devastating maledictions. Now he realizes that the last and climactic woe must be pronounced against—himself! And why? “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isa. 6:5)

I think I can hear dear people around Isaiah reply sympathetically—worried that his friend of many years is becoming unstable: *“Not you, Isaiah; you are the last person of whom that is true. You are our most pious and most eloquent preacher.”*

I think I hear Isaiah say in response, “You do not understand. I have seen the King. I have felt the pollution on my tongue. The light has exposed the darkness in its every crevice. You must understand that for me, it is in the very instrument God has called me to use, and yet it is the part of me that my sin has most deeply entangled itself. **I am a wretched man! Woe, woe, woe is me!**”

Only when we have been brought to such a recognition do we realize how dangerous and destructive our tongues have been. Only then do we cry out to God in repentance and run to him with tears to seek forgiveness in the gospel.

And we know Isaiah’s lips were purged when He got forgiveness from God. You can’t do anything about the evil words you’ve said except admit to those you’ve harmed that you need forgiveness, and seek forgiveness from God.

2) Recognize that you are a new creation in Christ

At the beginning of his argument, James had urged his hearers, You need to recognize that you have become a new creation in Christ Jesus, indeed a kind of “first fruits of his creation” (Jms. 1:18). I may not yet be that mature man I want to be. But thank God that I am not the old man that I once was!

John Newton, author of Amazing Grace, said it well, “I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not ... still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.”

We are regenerated. We can never ever again be what we once were. And yet live in a created order marred by sin. That sin has twisted and polluted our speech. But God has begun his work of new creation and will bring it to completion when Jesus Christ returns. Then in the “regeneration” of all things (Matt. 19:28), every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

On that day your tongue will never sin again! Hallelujah. But right now He’s growing and changing you into the image of Christ.

3) Continue in the Word

Christians who are born again love the Word of God. As the heart hears with open ears the Word of God again and again, it is renewed and begins to produce a transformed tongue. The principle is this: what comes out of our mouths is more and more determined by what has come out of “the mouth of God.”

The most important single aid to my ability to use my tongue for the glory of Jesus is allowing the Word of God to dwell in me so richly that I cannot speak with any other accent. When I do, the result is “teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing. . . . And . . . in word or deed, do[ing] everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father” (Col. 3:16–17).

4) Get Accountability

James says we need to “confess our sins one to another” (Jms 5:16). You need to have accountability yourself and if you are married, you need a mediator. You need someone your wife can text or go to when things are escalating. You should be able to call your elders or someone you really trust in the church. Just begin by reaching out.

Conclusion

Ultimately the solution for the tongue is the heart. We can wear masks and act like things are ok, but we really need to take the masks off. We need to realize there is great grace for all our sins. And we need to do the hard work of sanctification.