

James 3:1–12

- 1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.
- 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.
- 3 Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.
- 4 Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.
- 5 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!
- 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.
- 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.
- 8 But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.
- 9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.
- 10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.
- 11 Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?
- 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

"Tongue Trouble"
James 3:1-12

INTRO:

Our tongues are very powerful. They can either do a great deal of good, or they can do cause tremendous damage! The influence of the tongue occupies James' thought in this next paragraph in his practical epistle. James begins his discussion of the tongue by picking on the most influential users of the tongue in the church, the teachers and preachers. James wrote we, who are privileged to lead God's church, will face ***“a stricter judgment.”*** When God gives us a larger influence, He demands a more severe accountability.

James is not just interested in applying this principle to preachers and teachers alone. God will hold each of us accountable for the influence we have in the lives of others. James' lesson is organized around three points.

- I. The Influence of a Controlled Tongue (v. 2-5a)***
- II. The Danger of an Uncontrolled Tongue (v. 5b-10)***
- III. The Secret of Controlling the Tongue (v. 11-12)***

I. The Influence of a Controlled Tongue (v. 1-5a)

James 3:1–5 ***“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. 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. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!”***

A. First, James tells us what a properly bridled tongue says about us.

v.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.”***

1. Someone may tell you we can be entirely sanctified in this life. The Bible does not agree. All of us will sin. While we will at times fail, we must not ever think this makes our sinfulness somehow acceptable to God. We always must strive to overcome our sinfulness with God's help. While entire sanctification is not attainable in this present life, a standard of spiritual maturity is achievable and should be the goal of our lives.

2. The Greek word translated ***“perfect”*** means ***‘complete or mature.’*** Spiritual maturity is marked by our ability to ***“bridle our tongues.”*** This means to direct the awesome power of our tongues to accomplish good and not evil. If a person can control his or her tongue, he is able to also control his or her whole body.

B. Two illustrations follow.

1. In **verse 3**, James writes about horses. Now while horses are not a part of our everyday experience as Christians today, the Christian of James' day would

identify with this word picture immediately. A large horse weighing many hundreds of pounds can be stopped dead or turned to the left or to the right by a small bit of metal weighing ounces placed in its mouth. So, also by implication, is the tongue.

2. In **verse 4** James changed the picture. He wrote about ships. Ships are large and powerful. Most ships in James' day were not driven by sails and the wind. What directs the ship? The huge masts and billowing sails do not steer the huge boat. Masts and sails provide the power and drive, but it is a relatively small item called a rudder which directs and steers the boat.

3 James drew analogy from these two pictures in the beginning of **verse 5**.

“Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.”

The tongue is small in comparison to the whole body and yet it can accomplish many things, good and bad. In **Matthew 12:34**, Jesus said,

“Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”

Often, it is someone's inability to control one's tongue that gets a person into deep trouble and makes them unusable in the service of the Lord. Verbal Advantage used to advertise by saying, *“People judge you by the words that you speak.”* Your tongue has more influence over the direction of our lives than we may realize.

C. Not only can the tongue do a great deal of good for you. It can wreak a great deal of havoc in your life!

II. The Danger of an Uncontrolled Tongue (v. 5b-10)

James 3:5-10 ***“See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.”***

A. He gave a three-fold description of the tongue. The tongue is a fire.

“See how great a forest a little fire kindles!”

James did not use the word match because they did not have matches in the first century, but believe me, it does not take much of a spark to make a major fire. If you or I destroy someone with our tongues, we can't ever make the damage go away.

1. Not only is the tongue a fire, it is also a world of iniquity. The tongue is a whole system characterized by sin. It can be a great tool of humankind's depraved nature!

2. The tongue also defiles the whole body. It is the channel through which the filth in our hearts can spout out onto the surface of our lives.

Matthew 15:11 *“Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.”*

Our uncontrolled tongue can destroy us. It can defile and destroy everything around it.

B. Not only is the uncontrolled tongue trouble. It is impossible to control in our own strength!

vs.7-10 *“For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so”*

Again, James used a word picture, a verbal flannel graph, to make us see the point. James was not interested in the various species of animals man has domesticated. Rather, he illustrated how we can control the spirit of many formerly wild animals, yet we cannot control our own tongues. We cannot control the tongue on our own because, in its natural state, the tongue is worse than a poisonous viper. It is filled with evil because we in our natural state are also evil.

v. 8 *“But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”*
Our tongues bless God and cursing those who were made in the image of God (v.9-10).

III. The Secret of Controlling the Tongue (v. 11-12)

James 3:11-12 *“Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.”*

A. What do we do with all of this information? We know that I am not to praise God and to curse men with the same tongue, but we can't seem to do anything about it. How do we control our tongues?

B. James gave us a statement on how to learn to control the tongue. The problem with the fountain is the source. The issue with the tree is its nature. It is what we are on the inside that comes out through our tongues. Where does the trouble with the tongue reside? Its source. The Bible calls that the heart! Look at the rest of the passage my Mom used to quote as she washed my mouth out with soap,

Matthew 12:34-37 *“Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word*

men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

We will be judged by our words because our words indicate what is in our hearts!

Beloved, the heart and the tongue are connected.

Psalm 141:3-4 ***“Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not incline my heart to any evil thing.”***

Again we read David's great prayer request in

Psalm 19:14 ***“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.”***

The source which feeds the fountain of our mouths is our heart. Our hearts as

Jeremiah 17:9 reminded us is ***“deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?”***

C. But there is hope for the heart, because God can and does change it. The change starts with Salvation. We also grow in control of our hearts as we seek to renew our minds in the Word of God. Finally, as we give more and more control over our lives to the Holy Spirit, we find He produces in us the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 ***“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control.”***

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... an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master ... 2 Tim. 2:21

1. How I praise thee, pre-cious Sav - ior, that thy love laid hold of me;
2. Emp-tied that thou should-est fill me, a clean ves - sel in thy hand,
3. Wit-ness-ing thy power to save me, set - ting free from self and sin,
4. Je - sus, fill now with thy Spir - it hearts that full sur-ren-der know,

thou hast saved and cleansed and filled me that I might thy chan - nel be.
with no power but as thou giv - est gra-cious-ly with each com-mand.
thou who bought me to pos-sess me, in thy full-ness, Lord, come in.
that the streams of liv - ing wa - ter from our in - ner selves may flow.

Refrain

Chan-nels on - ly, bless-ed Mas-ter, but with all thy won-drous power

flow-ing through us, thou canst use us ev - ery day and ev - ery hour.

WORDS: Mary E. Maxwell, 1900, alt.
MUSIC: Ada R. Gibbs, 1900

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