

## **Controlling the Tongue**

### **James 3:1-12 NKJV**

3 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.

We need to remember where we are in this passage.

He has just told us that faith without works is dead. And then he moves on to discuss the control of the tongue.

There is a link. And that is that those who have faith will control the tongue.

Now I know that he tells us that the tongue cannot be tamed by man, he implies that the tongue can be tamed by God, by the Holy Spirit if you will.

Is James giving us all a free pass with reference to the tongue saying that since no one can tame the tongue that the Christian is not to be held responsible.

James 1:26 (NKJV) 26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

Nothing could be farther from the truth.

So let us look at this passage and learn about this terribly unruly member that sets on fire the

#### I. Look Out Teachers

A. 3 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.

B. Here he is talking about spiritual teachers.

1. Because they teach the word of God they have a responsibility to live what they preach not just believe it.

2. That is how works comes in from the last passage.
  3. Teachers, like others have a weak point and that is the tongue, or the language they use.
  4. Many proclaim their spiritual character and teach great things but they spoil all that they proclaim with the tongue by the misuse of the tongue.
  5. I have no use for Bible teachers or pastors that use God's name in vain or other profanity.
- C. By a misuse of the tongue they cause many to stumble by them following our actions rather than our teaching.
1. Don't do as I do but do as I say.
  2. Someone was telling me about a man who was a great Bible teacher who had a gift to connect with people, but they spoke like a fool in private.
  3. I told them that that person should never be given an opportunity to address the group again.
  4. Why because James makes it very clear that teachers will receive a stricter judgment.
    - a. Not judgment from God for God did not need to wait for them to speak to know what was in their hearts.
    - b. But from people.
    - c. If someone claims to be spiritual when they teach but is carnal in their everyday conversation, then their religion is vain.
    - d. It is their tongue that will give them away.
    - e. That is what James is saying here.
- D. The key to controlling the tongue.
1. No man can control the tongue.
  2. What is he saying. It is that of our own selves we cannot control the tongue.
  3. But the Christian is never on his own for God is with him and the Holy Spirit is in him.
    - a. The tongue is you in a unique way. It is a tattletale that tells on the heart and discloses the real person. Not only that, but misuse of the tongue is perhaps the easiest way to sin. There are some sins that an individual may not be able to commit simply because he does not have the opportunity. But there are no limits to what one can

say, no built-in restraints or boundaries. In Scripture, the tongue is variously described as wicked, deceitful, perverse, filthy, corrupt, flattering, slanderous, gossiping, blasphemous, foolish, boasting, complaining, cursing, contentious, sensual, and vile. And that list is not exhaustive. No wonder God put the tongue in a cage behind the teeth, walled in by the mouth! Using another figure, someone has observed that because the tongue is in a wet place, it can easily slip. *John MacArthur, MacArthur New Testament Commentary – James, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 144.*

4. That is how we become perfect.
  - a. The word is best understood as mature, full grown.
  - b. It has the idea of not young and weak or frail, but of mature, complete.
  - c. This by no means implies perfectionism for we cannot reach that in this life.
  - d. If we say we have no sin we make God a liar.

II. The tongue, little but powerfully important.

- A. 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!
- B. The tongue is like the horses bit.
  1. With it you can control the horse, without you cannot.
  2. Once we can, with the help of the Spirit, control the tongue we can control all of our life.
  3. A horse without being trained by a bit is of no use to anyone.
  4. But a horse that has been trained and fitted with a bit can be of great service.
  5. One of the greatest mistakes parents make to day is not teaching children how to control themselves.
- C. The rudder is like the tongue.
  1. Have you ever seen these great cruse ships.
    - a. They are so large and grand.

- b. But without a rudder they would be worthless.
    - c. But even though the rudder is so small in comparison to the whole ship yet it sets the course of the journey.
  - 2. So it is with the tongue.
    - a. It can be our best asset or our greatest curse.
    - b. That is why it is so important to have it under control.
- D. The fire on our candles here seems so small and insignificant but we could set a whole forest on fire with it.
  - 1. The tongue is like that as he tells us in our next section.
  - 2. 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.
  - 3. So then the tongue can be a blessing or it can burn down the entire life a person.
  - 4. No wonder James mentions the tongue so many times is this short letter.
- E. So the Christian could never be so effected by the tongue in this way right?
  - 1. What James is telling us is that is how you tell the difference between a true believer and a false one.
  - 2. Remember Jesus said that by their fruits you will know them.
    - a. Matthew 7:16 “You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 “Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor [can] a bad tree bear good fruit.
  - 3. It is not that the Christian could never loose control of the tongue for a moment.
    - a. Peter did when he cursed and claimed that he did not even know Jesus.
    - b. Moses spoke foolishly and struck the rock the second time and was excluded from entering the promised land.
  - 4. But the repented and God forgave them.
  - 5. No this has the idea of a continual demonstration that the person does not control the tongue.

### III. Our challenger the tongue.

- A. 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.
- B. Taming the tongue.
1. Every animal is tameable by man.
  2. Land animals, tigers, lions, and others.
  3. Sea creatures.
    - a. Sea World.
    - b. Even reptiles
  4. But not the tongue.
    - a. Today it might be our facebook account or our twitter feed.
    - b. It could be expressed by a letter or other method.
    - c. Which brings us to the real problem, the heart.
    - d. Jesus said that all these wicked and hurtful things come from the heart, the tongue is just how we put them into words.
    - e. A lost person can no more tame the tongue than he can the rest of his carnal actions, his lusts and desires.
    - f. The tongue, though small and seemingly insignificant, if left to go unbridled, results in an uncontrolled man. That man's life will be unchecked and unguided. A horse controlled by a bit can render a great service, but uncontrolled it can render much harm. A tongue, controlled by the Lord Jesus Christ, can be a great blessing, but an uncontrolled tongue will do much damage. *Lehman Strauss, Lehman Strauss Commentaries – James, Your Brother: Studies in the Epistle of James, (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1967), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 130.*
  5. We all have learned from experience that **no powers of the natural man** are adequate to control the tongue, promises and resolutions notwithstanding. Let me be frank in my application of this verse and say that in the matter of insubordination, man is worse than the beasts. *Lehman Strauss, Lehman Strauss Commentaries – James, Your Brother: Studies in the*

*Epistle of James, (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1967), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 134.*

- C. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.
1. The difference is James is speaking to Christian brethren.
    - a. Your speech tells who you are; your tongue gives you away. It tells where you came from. It tells whether you are ignorant or educated, cultured or crude, whether you are clean or unclean, whether you are vulgar or refined, whether you are a believer or a blasphemer, whether you are a Christian or a non-Christian, whether you are guilty or not guilty. My friend, I am of the opinion that if you had a tape-recorded message of everything you have said this past month, you would not want the world to hear it. *J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible Commentary: The Epistles (James), electronic ed., vol. 53 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 76.*
  2. Those who have surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ.
  3. It only through being born again that we can tame the tongue.
  4. Only through the inward work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Here is a good test for you. Is your tongue out of control?

Are you constantly in trouble for the things that you say.

Would Jesus be satisfied with your language?

If not then give you life over to Jesus.

Tell Him you are a sinner, guilty of all that God has accused you of.

And then ask Him to take away your sin. And if you are sincere He will.

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Psalm 39:1 (NKJV) 1 I said, "I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me."

Matthew 12:36-37 (NKJV) 36 But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Proverbs 16:27 (NKJV) 27 An ungodly man digs up evil, And it is on his lips like a burning fire.

Romans 3:13-14 (NKJV) 13 "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; 14 "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."