

James 3:2-12 The Untamable Tongue

"The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (Proverbs 18:21). Taming the tongue is vital so we don't stumble, experience unnecessary relationship damage, or get pushed off the course that God set for our lives. James says:

James 3:10: "From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so."

- **Grammatical Usage:** "**blessing**" or in the Greek, "eulogia" meaning, "invocation of goodness"; "**cursing**" or "katara" meaning, "illegitimate judgment expression".
- **Literal Interpretation:** From the same mouth comes a call for goodness and expressions of judgment reserved only for God. Fellow believers, both should not be so.
- **Contextual/Comparison:** God keeps His Word: God continually uses His Word.

I. **THE "DISCOURSE" ON THE UNTAMABLE TONGUE (vv. 3-12)**

A. **THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE BIT AND RUDDER (vv. 3-4)**

- a. Both illustrations are used to demonstrate that a small member (like the tongue) can control the body
- b. So our tongue controls the body...
 1. If you speak a lie, it won't be long before you find yourself living a lie
 2. If you speak suggestively in an immoral manner, it won't be long before you begin acting immorally!
- c. The power of the tongue to direct is easily applied to the dangers of teaching...
 1. The teacher's speech can easily set the mood of the class or congregation
 2. He can easily direct the congregation in an uplifting way, or just as easily direct the congregation in a discouraging way
- d. Should not this power to direct via the tongue humble those who teach, and caution the spiritually immature?

B. **THE ILLUSTRATION OF A LITTLE FIRE (vv. 5-6)**

- a. A small fire can easily cause great destruction (remember the Great Chicago Fire?)
- b. So it is with the tongue!
 1. A loose tongue can ruin one's reputation
 2. It can also destroy churches, families, friendships
- c. In describing an uncontrolled tongue, James uses very vivid terms to make his point: The tongue is...
 1. A fire
 2. A world of iniquity
 3. So set among our bodies that it defiles the whole body
 4. That which sets on fire the course of nature
 5. That which is itself set on fire by hell!
- d. Should not this power to destroy and defile both ourselves and others caution us in becoming teachers?

C. **THE DIFFICULTY OF TAMING THE TONGUE (vv. 7-12)**

- a. Despite being able to tame wild animals, man is unable to tame the tongue!

1. It is an unruly evil!
2. It is full of deadly poison!
- b. I understand James to be somewhat hyperbolic here for the sake of emphasis...
 1. It is true that no MAN (by himself) can tame the tongue
 2. But with GOD'S help, we can tame it (as David prayed in **Ps 141:3**)
 3. And with GOD'S help, we MUST tame it - cf. **Ep 4:29; Col 4:6**
- c. As a further example of how difficult it is to tame the tongue, James uses a very common (and relevant) problem
 1. I.e., blessing God and cursing men
 2. Something we are very likely to do, especially on Sundays
 1. We spend time in worship, blessing God
 2. But in driving home, we might curse men (other drivers who pull out in front of us)
 3. Racists and bigots are often guilty of "blessing God and cursing men"!
- d. But with the illustrations of a spring, a fig tree and a grapevine, James shows the inconsistency of this!
 1. What comes forth is a true indication of what is inside
 2. Just as Jesus taught in **Mk 7:20-23**
 3. Despite all the praises we offer God, it is the curses against man that reveals the true person inside!

II. Ways to Tame the Tongue

Taming the tongue is an important aspect of Christian living. Here are some effective strategies:

- a. **Dedicate Your Heart and Words**
 1. **Daily Commitment:** Start each day by dedicating your heart, mind, and tongue to God. This helps align your speech with His will (**Col. 4:6**).
 2. **Pray for Protection:** Ask God to guard your thoughts and words, steering you away from destructive speech.
- b. **Think Before You Speak**
 1. **Pause and Reflect:** Before saying anything, consider if your words are true, necessary, and kind. This practice can prevent regretful comments.
 2. **Be Slow to Speak:** Follow the biblical advice to be "**slow to speak and quick to listen**" (**James 1:19**).
- c. **Use Words to Build Up**
 1. **Encouragement:** Focus on using your words to uplift and inspire others. **Proverbs 16:24** states, "**Kind words are like honey, sweet to the soul.**"
 2. **Avoid Negative Speech:** Steer clear of gossip, slander, and criticism. Instead, aim to speak truth in love (**Ephesians 4:15**).
- d. **Pray for Wisdom and Self-Control**
 1. **Seek Divine Guidance:** Regularly pray for wisdom and self-control in your speech. **James 1:5** encourages believers to ask God for wisdom, which He provides generously.
- e. **Practice Active Listening**
 1. **Engage Fully:** Show respect and love by listening actively. This creates a supportive environment for open communication (**James 1:19**).

By implementing this biblical guidance, Christians can work towards taming their tongues, fostering healthier relationships, and honoring God through their speech.

- **Conclusion:** Will I purposely commit to minding my speech as the Holy Spirit gives me direction?