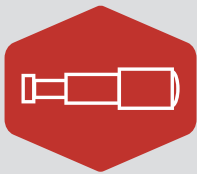




Lesson 8: Tame Your Tongue

Main Idea: This portion of James teaches another aspect of the practical side of the Christian life: Real, vital faith will affect your words. The greater control you gain over your tongue, the greater control you have altogether. James addresses the seriousness with which you should approach the use of your tongue, driving home the point that the tongue is powerfully destructive and difficult to control, but you as a Christian must master it.

Scripture: James 3:1-12



The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.

Although any sin can keep you from walking in God's ways, the tongue presents an especially difficult challenge for the Christian. In a close parallel to James, the Jewish writer Philo (Posterity, 88) described this challenge well: "But if a man succeeded, as if handling a lyre, in bringing all the notes of the thing that is good into tune, bringing speech into harmony with intent, and intent with deed, such an one would be considered perfect and of a truly harmonious character."¹ James asserts that there is a level of perfection you can attain. By perfect, he means mature or being fully developed in your character.

The Bible itemizes the many sins it is possible for the tongue to commit, but here is a brief overview. One, of course, is gossip, which is perhaps not the

¹ Guthrie, "James," 13:245.

most serious sin that the tongue can commit. Gossip is hearsay information that becomes part of the grapevine. It is passed-along information without malicious intent. The body of information, however, as it is passed along, grows with each telling.

Another sin of speech is slander. Someone once said, “A tongue three inches long can kill a man six foot high.” This is because slander involves character assassination. It is sometimes done with conscious will and sometimes without.

Another sin of the tongue is boasting, which is a false form of self-esteem, where you make yourself out to be better than you are or better than other people. Another is quarreling, when done in anger and continual, needless confrontation with another person.

Then there is cursing, which is more than simply invoking God’s name in vain or using an oath. Cursing can include negative, put-down speech, where you pull someone down rather than build them up. In this way, cursing can even mean fault finding as a way of speaking.

There is foolish speech, which Paul speaks of in Ephesians 5:4. This is a constant, meaningless drivel.

Another sin of the tongue is false teaching. Titus 1:11 says, “They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.”

Finally, there is filthy speech, which has sexual references to it (Ephesians 5:4) and speech which involves lying and perjury, a violation of the ninth commandment (Exodus 20:16).

James likens the out-of-control tongue to something that receives its motivation from hell. An uncontrolled tongue is in direct opposition to the righteous living God desires. James uses the word “restless” to describe the tongue. One commentary suggests, “The word ‘restless’ (*akatastatos*,) also connotes the concept of being ‘unstable’ and occurs in James’s description of the double-minded person of 1:8. In one ancient work, slander is personified as a ‘restless demon’ (Shepherd of Hermas, Mand. 2:3).”²

James explores the significance and influence the tongue has in the life of a Christian, emphasizing that you cannot tame the tongue on your own. The problem is a spiritual one because the tongue is under the influence of the sinful nature. But God through the power of His Holy Spirit gives you the power to control your tongue and your total being.

² Guthrie, “James,” 13:247.



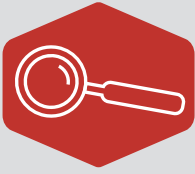
My Lens (Eyeglasses)

What does this Scripture say to you? Through completing the reading assignments below, you will better understand what God's Word is saying to you.

The tongue sets a climate of encouragement or discouragement. It uplifts or it tears down. It heals or it hurts. James begins his teaching on the tongue with a reference to the people in the body of Christ who ostensibly use their tongue the most: teachers.

James never tells specifically how to control the tongue; he just gives six illustrations of the damage the tongue can do in verses 3 through 12. Consider the following:

- A teacher's words will be judged by a higher standard (3:1).
- Those who control their tongues can also control themselves in every other way (3:2).
- Like a bit in a horse's mouth, if you can control your mouth, you command your obedience and determine your direction (3:3).
- Like a ship's small rudder, the tongue controls much larger things (3:4).
- Like a fire, the tongue can do uncontrollable, far-reaching damage (3:5-6).
- No man can tame the tongue; only God can (3:7-8).
- The tongue was given to enhance fellowship and communication (3:9-11).
- The tongue will reveal what is on the inside of you (3:12).



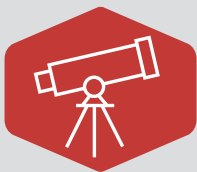
The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)

How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.

Application:

- Write down your answer to the following questions here or in your journal:
 - » Who appears in this passage?
 - » Where is this passage taking place?
 - » When is this passage occurring?
 - » Why is this passage important?
 - » What is happening in this passage?
 - » How does this passage apply to my life?
- Circle and write down any reoccurring words in this passage.
 - » Describe a time when you talked your way into trouble.

- Think about your personality and disposition. When is it easy for you to sin with your tongue?
- Describe a time when God helped you control your tongue.
- Read Psalm 141:3; 1 John 1:9; Psalm 34:1; and Ephesians 4:29. What are four things Scripture teaches to help you gain control over the tongue?
- Read James 3:9–12 and Matthew 12:33–34; 15:18–19. What can you glean about your heart and its influence on your speech?



Upward and Outward Focus (Telescope)

How does the Scripture affect your relationship with God and others? You experience God's Word in action as you use it to direct your journey with Him and those around you. Answer the following questions and record the answers in your journal.

- Take some time to listen to the Lord about the text you just studied. How did these verses help deepen your love for God?

- As a result of your deepened love for God, how can you practically demonstrate this love to others?



Using My *FireBible*

Read the study notes for the following verses in the Fire-Bible and answer the accompanying questions.

- James 3:6. What are some descriptors of sinful speech?
- How can mature Christians keep their tongue under control?
- James 3:9. What can you learn about the words people say?

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®)
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