

## Do you need a fire extinguisher?

(James 3:1-12)

### WHAT IS TRUE, AND WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

God offers us a gracious provision in the gospel for the sinful words that come from our evil hearts. Believers ought to control their speech because the tongue is capable of great damage, influencing life for good and bad in a way greatly out of proportion to its size. This is especially true for teachers in the church, but it applies to everyone. Unique among creation is the sinful human tendency for dishonest, deceitful, hurtful, and ungodly speech.

#### 1.) Believers ought not to aspire to become teachers hastily (v.1–2)

- This is because teachers (who depend so heavily on their tongues) will be judged more strictly when they sin (because of their more widespread influence) (v. 1).<sup>1</sup>

#### 2.) The tongue influences for good (v. 2-5)

- Right speech is a sign of Christian maturity (v. 2)
- It is like a bridle/bit or a rudder, steering the right course (v. 3–4)
- Little object controlling a big one, impacting things greatly (v.5)

#### 3.) The tongue influences for bad (v. 5–8)

- It is like a small spark, setting a large forest on fire (v. 5–6)
- It is like an untamable creature (v. 7–8)

#### 4.) The tongue creates the potential for inconsistent Christian living, contrary to God’s creation and desire for your life (v.9–12)

- Disgracefully, humans can simultaneously bless and curse (9–10)
- This inconsistency does not occur elsewhere in creation (11–12)

### APPLICATION (bringing your speech under God’s control):

- A problem of the tongue is a problem of the heart. Pray for God’s help.
- Focus on the positive; count your blessings from God and rest in his provision and care for you. This takes away the anger and bitterness from your spirit, which tempts us to make negative comments or accusations towards others.
- Focus on the great love God has for you and everyone created in His image. As we allow God to satisfy our spiritual needs, we will have less need to strike out at others. We see others as created in His image.
- Learn to see others as someone for whom Christ died too! Your focus is to love God, love others, and make disciples despite how unlovable they seem.
- Avoid gossip. Wait before responding to a comment or criticism.
- Treat everything, we say as a gift to another person. We should ask: “Are my words a gift I truly want to leave in their hands?” Do you love your neighbor as yourself? Try this: make five positive comments to every negative one. In other words: *if you have nothing good to say, keep your lips closed.*
- Pray and memorize: 2 Cor. 10:5 and James 1:19–26.

**Exercise:** It’s time for an oral check-up—no, not a dental visit, but an examination of your tongue and mouth. Inspect the kind of speech that rolls off your tongue and out of your mouth. Think back over the last week and give yourself a “thumbs up” (i.e., I’m innocent!) or a “thumbs down” (i.e., I’m sinfully guilty!) in each of the following categories:<sup>2</sup>

| Possibly Sinful Behavior:      | Thumbs Up: (√) | Thumbs Down: (x) |
|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Bragging/boasting              |                |                  |
| Lying                          |                |                  |
| Flattering                     |                |                  |
| Slandering                     |                |                  |
| Gossiping                      |                |                  |
| Verbally abusing others        |                |                  |
| Cursing or complaining         |                |                  |
| Making off-color remarks       |                |                  |
| Talking behind another’s back  |                |                  |
| Passing on rumors              |                |                  |
| Shading the truth              |                |                  |
| Arguing                        |                |                  |
| Yelling                        |                |                  |
| Being sarcastic or cutting     |                |                  |
| Teaching questionable “truths” |                |                  |

### Remember:

- Your words demonstrate your self-control and spiritual maturity.
- Your words are powerful.
- Your words can be destructive.
- Your words reveal your heart.
- Your words should bring glory to God.

**What Springs from you?** James’ readers knew some springs had been contaminated by salty water, and some had gone brackish and foul. But others still bubbled up safe and clean water. It would be like comparing the fresh-flowing Jordan River with the salty Dead Sea. Although different kinds of water won’t bubble from the same opening, Christians’ speech can be very inconsistent. One time we may speak in a way that honors God, and another time in a way that gives Satan the power to operate. We can choose how we will respond. If we do not, we give Satan an opening to control us. Honor God with your lips.<sup>3</sup> **Proverbs 13:3 says, “He who guards his lips guards his life.”**

<sup>1</sup> Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, James, vol. 16, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 151.

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, James: Guidelines for a Happy Christian Life, MacArthur Bible Studies (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2001), 61.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, James, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), 83.