

WHY WE SHOULD CONTROL OUR TONGUE, PART 2

James 3:1-12

¹Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. ²For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. ³Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. ⁴Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. ⁵So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! ⁶And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. ⁷For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. ⁸But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; ¹⁰from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. ¹¹Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.

2:14-26 A living faith will be accompanied by good _____

3:1-12 A living faith will be accompanied by good _____
(A changed _____ will produce a changed _____)

WHY SHOULD WE CONTROL OUR TONGUE?

① Our tongues _____ us

v. 1-2a - *Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways.*

↓
→ for unbelievers: the great white throne judgment (Mat. 12:33-37; Rev. 20:11-15)
→ for believers: the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:9-15; 2 Cor. 5:10)
stricter than everyone else

- Matthew 12:36-37 - ³⁶*But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. ³⁷For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*

② Our tongues _____ us (HORSES AND SHIPS)

v. 2b-5a - ^{2b}*If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. ³Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. ⁴Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. ^{5a}So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.*

- Our speech sets the direction of our life.
- The words that come out of our mouth are an expression of our heart; therefore, what we talk about freely we will ultimately do.

③ Our tongues _____ us (FIRE)

A truism

v. 5b - *See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire.*

Application

v. 6a - *The tongue is a fire*

Proverbs 16:27 - *A worthless man's words are like scorching fire.*

Q: What is the common denominator between the tongue and a fire?

A: Both of them can _____ and _____ everything in their path

v. 6 - *And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.*

- *And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity*
 - Edmond Hiebert - “No other member of our body has comparable power and range of influence for evil. It can give utterance to every evil thought and motive and put every evil deed into words.”
 - The tongue is the one member of the body that can have a part in every known sin—it has the capacity to commit the full range of iniquity
 - lying
 - deceit
 - dishonesty
 - gossip
 - slander
 - quarreling and arguing
 - whining and complaining
 - self-justification
 - bragging
 - blame-shifting
 - meddling
 - coarse, vulgar speech
 - taking God's name in vain
 - cursing
 - talking too much
 - talking too little
 - excessive jesting and joking
 - flattery
 - manipulation
 - bitter words
 - angry words
 - selfish words
 - sarcastic or cutting words
 - self-pity

verb



- the tongue is set among our members

- (1) *as that which defiles the entire body,*
- (2) *and sets on fire the course of our life,*
- (3) *and is set on fire by hell.*

participles

(showing the breadth of destruction that the tongue can cause)

- *is set* (kathistēmi)

- Who is doing the setting?

(1) God?

(2) the tongue itself?

- James 4:4b - ...*whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself* (kathistēmi) *an enemy of God.*



Paraphrase: The tongue “*makes itself*” (or “sets itself” as) the cause of the following kinds of destruction:

- (1) it defiles the entire body



the entire person

spiloō = “to stain” or “to corrupt”

- James 1:27 - ...*keep oneself unstained* (aspilos) *by the world.*

- But we have an even greater problem than the world outside of us, we have our tongues _____ us that stain us.

- Matthew 15:11 - *It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.*

- (2) it sets on fire the course of our life

- There is no part of our life untouched by our tongue

(1) _____—from birth to death

(2) _____—it affects everything in its sphere of influence

- The tongue acts as a fire which wreaks havoc throughout a person’s life

- (3) it is set on fire by hell



- Gehenna (Greek) = Valley of Hinnom (Hebrew expression)

- Ahaz (2 Chr. 28:3) and Manasseh (2 Chr. 33:6) offered child sacrifices
- King Josiah cleansed the place of idols (2 Kings 23:10)
- Eventually it became a city dump with fires constantly burning
- It was used by Christ in his teaching as a visual illustration of hell (Mk 9:42-50)

- **The point:** When we sin with our mouths, we are mimicking _____

The point of v. 6: The devastating effects of an uncontrolled tongue on the one who speaks and on others

- George Stulac - *“The images thus build in a progression. The first phrase points to the multitude of evils contained within and it prompts impure speech. The second phrase warns that the whole person becomes corrupted by the uncontrolled tongue. The third adds to the corruption the picture of destruction and extends it to the whole course of the person’s life. The fourth phrase provides the climax by exposing the tongue’s source of evil: hell itself. It is altogether a devastating denunciation.”*
- In a forest fire, it’s not just the match that started the fire that burns, it spreads destruction
- Descriptions in Scripture of sinful words:
 - an ambush (Jer. 9:8)
 - a deadly arrow (Psa. 64:3; Jer. 9:8)
 - a sword (Psa. 64:3)
 - sword thrusts (Pro. 12:18)
 - a sharp razor (Psa. 52:2)
 - a serpent (Psa. 140:3)
 - the poison of a viper (Psa. 140:3)
 - a scorching fire (Pro. 16:27)
- Proverbs 26:18-28 - ¹⁸*Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death,* ¹⁹*so is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, “Was I not joking?”* ²⁰*For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.* ²¹*Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife.* ²²*The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body.* ²³*Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross are burning lips and a wicked heart.* ²⁴*He who hates disguises it with his lips, but he lays up deceit in his heart.* ²⁵*When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart.* ²⁶*Though his hatred covers itself with guile, his wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.* ²⁷*He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.* ²⁸*A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin.*

④ Our tongues _____ us (BEASTS, BIRDS, REPTILES, SEA CREATURES)

v. 7-8a - ⁷*For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race.* ⁸*But no one can tame the tongue...*

↓ dynamai = ability or power
↓ anthrōpos = man

- No man has the ability or power to tame the tongue

- We are like the epitaph found on a tombstone in a graveyard in England:

*Beneath this stone a lump of clay lies Aribella Young,
who on the 24th of May began to hold her tongue.*

- Only at death will be truly be able to master our tongue

The point: It is impossible to fully tame the tongue. But just as with a wild animal, we have to always be watching and always alert.

v. 8b - *it is a restless* (akatastatos) *evil*

- James 1:8 - *a double-minded man, unstable (akatastatos) in all his ways.*

v. 8c - *and full of deadly poison*

- Psalm 140:3 - *They sharpen their tongues as a serpent; poison of a viper is under their lips.*
- Romans 3:13 - ¹³*THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING, THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS. WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS.*

We must treat our tongues as wild animals and deadly snakes.

- Psalm 39:1 - *I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle...*

5 Our tongues _____ us (FOUNTAINS AND FRUIT TREES)
(ultimately, our tongues reveal exactly who we are)

v. 9a - *With it we bless our Lord and Father*

- This is the _____ use of our speech

v. 9b - *and with it we curse men*

- This is one of the _____ uses of our speech
- To curse someone means to call on God to cut a person off from all blessing in this life, and to condemn them to hell in the next life.

v. 9c - *who have been made in the likeness of God.*

- Genesis 1:27 - *God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*
- Genesis 9:6 - *Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.*
- To strike at the _____, is to strike at _____ Himself
- James uses this same argument to for why we must not attack people with our mouths: because they are made in the image of God

v. 10 - *from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.*

- **The point:** It is utterly inconsistent to bless God with our mouth, and then immediately curse those made in His image
- George Stulac - *"Consider the habitual, verbal abuse that occurs in our churches—how commonplace is it for us to speak of others with ridicule or with cutting remarks, how quickly we accuse others of evil motives when they do things we don't like and how easily we can have angry fights in our churches. Where is our biblical sense of shock at all this?"*

Three illustrations from the natural world showing how wrong it is to be inconsistent with our tongues:

(1) A fountain

v. 11 - *Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?*

(2) A tree or vine

v. 12a - *Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs?*

(3) A spring

v. 12b - *Nor can a salt spring produce fresh*

The point: The fruit identifies the _____. Nothing can produce what is contrary to its own nature. Therefore, if you could step back and take an honest look at what comes out of your mouth, over a period of time, your words will reveal who you truly _____.

- Matthew 12:33-35 - ³³*Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit.* ³⁴*You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.* ³⁵*The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil.*
- Our mouth is an accurate gauge of our _____
- Listen to what comes out of your mouth and it will tell you exactly who you are
- George Stulac - *"To the person who speaks praise to God in the worship service and then abuses people verbally at home or at work, James commands, "Purify your speech throughout the week." With the person who says, "Oh, I know I talk too much," and laughs it off, James is not amused. By the person who boasts, "I always speak my mind, no matter who gets hurt," James is not impressed. He commands, "Discipline your speaking." Of the person who says, "I know I gossip too much, but I just can't help it," James still requires, "Control your tongue." Of the person who is in the habit of speaking with insults, ridicule or sarcasm, James demands, "Change your speech habits." He expects discipline to be happening in the life of a Christian. There is no justification for corrupt habits of speech in our churches today. We simply must repent."*