

## WHY WE SHOULD CONTROL OUR TONGUE, PART 1

### James 3:1-12

<sup>1</sup>Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. <sup>2</sup>For 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. <sup>3</sup>Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. <sup>4</sup>Look 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. <sup>5</sup>So 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! <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. <sup>8</sup>But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup>With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; <sup>10</sup>from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. <sup>11</sup>Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? <sup>12</sup>Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.

James personifies the tongue to address our \_\_\_\_\_

- This is a crucial issue to James who mentions our speech in every chapter of his letter (1:19, 26; 2:12; 3:5, 6 (twice), 8; 4:11; 5:12)

- James 1:26 - *If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.*

The point: Our speech indicates whether there has been a true heart change

### James

**1:1** James (half-brother of Jesus and pastor the Jerusalem church), a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

**1:2-12** How to respond to \_\_\_\_\_

**1:13-18** How to respond to \_\_\_\_\_

**1:19-27** How to respond to \_\_\_\_\_

**2:1-13** How to view \_\_\_\_\_ (not with favoritism or prejudice due to external factors)

**2:14-26** How to tell the difference between a living faith and a dead faith

[v. 26 ...*faith without works is dead*]

**3:1-12** Why we should control our tongue (Richard Tasker - "*Words are also* \_\_\_\_\_.")

→ **The point of 2:14-26:** A living faith will be accompanied by good works

→ **The point of 3:1-12:** A living faith will be accompanied by good \_\_\_\_\_

## WHY SHOULD WE CONTROL OUR TONGUE?

### ① Our tongues \_\_\_\_\_ us

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

- Historical context
  - The leaders in the synagogues were teachers
  - The early church resembled the synagogue with leaders as teachers
    - Acts 13:1 - *Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, teachers*
    - 1 Timothy 2:7 - *For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle...as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.*
    - Ephesians 4:11-12 - *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.*
  - The role of a teacher was highly esteemed as seen in the title given to the leaders of the Jewish synagogue (\_\_\_\_\_ = “my great one”). They were held in higher esteem than even one’s father. Being a teacher placed you over others in society.

**v. 2 - *For 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.***

- Proverbs 10:19 - *When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable.*

**Summary:** Don't desire the role of a teacher if God hasn't gifted you and called you to that role, because the primary tool of a teacher is his \_\_\_\_\_. And as a teacher, you will...

- (1) use more words, which makes you more susceptible to \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 2)
- (2) be held to a stricter \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 1)
  - Teachers will be held to a higher standard in \_\_\_\_\_ the truth
    - John 3:10 - [Jesus to Nicodemus:] *Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?*
  - Teachers will be held to a higher standard in \_\_\_\_\_ what they teach
    - Romans 2:17-21 - <sup>17</sup>*If you bear the name “Jew” and rely upon the Law and boast in God, <sup>18</sup>and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, <sup>19</sup>and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, <sup>20</sup>a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, <sup>21</sup>you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?*

v. 1 - *Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment* implies that \_\_\_\_\_ will incur judgment for their words.

- Unbelievers

- Matthew 12:33-37 - <sup>33</sup>*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.* <sup>34</sup>*You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.* <sup>35</sup>*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.* <sup>36</sup>*But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.* <sup>37</sup>*For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*

↓  
condemned (katadikazō) - “to pass sentence on”. At the judgment, unbelievers will hear their own words passing judgment on them.

- Romans 3:10-13 - <sup>10</sup>*THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;* <sup>11</sup>*THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS; THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD.* <sup>12</sup>*ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE'S NONE WHO DOES GOOD, NOT EVEN ONE.* }

General descriptions of man's sinfulness

  

<sup>13</sup>*THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING, THE POISON OF ASPES IS UNDER THEIR LIPS. WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS.*

}

Specifics of what makes man guilty before God

- Believers

- 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 - <sup>9</sup>*For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field; you are God's field, God's building.* <sup>10</sup>*According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I lay a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.* <sup>11</sup>*For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* <sup>12</sup>*Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,* <sup>13</sup>*each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.* <sup>14</sup>*If any man's work which has been built on it remains, he will receive a reward.* <sup>15</sup>*If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*
  - John MacArthur - “This is, first of all, in reference to the evangelists and pastors (v. 9), and then to all believers who are called to the build the church through faithful ministry.”
  - Romans 14:10 - *But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.*
  - 2 Corinthians 5:10 - *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good (worthwhile/eternal deeds done in the Spirit) or bad (useless deeds done in the flesh).*

Teachers within the church should take their responsibility seriously.

- Douglas Moo - *“Teachers, because they bear so much responsibility for the spiritual welfare of those to whom they minister, will be scrutinized by the Lord more carefully than others.”*
- Luke 12:48 - *To whom much is given, much will be required.*
- *This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight (1 Timothy 1:18) ...The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2).*
- 2 Timothy 2:15 - *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed, accurately handling the Word of truth.*

**The point of v. 1-2a:** Words are \_\_\_\_\_. They will be judged by God either:  
(1) at the great white throne judgment as an unbeliever (Mat. 12:33-37; Rev. 20:11-15) or  
(2) at the judgment seat of Christ as a believer (Mat. 12:33-37; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

**2** Our tongues \_\_\_\_\_ us

**v. 2c** - *If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.*

our entire person  
(all the aspects of our spiritual life)

- *perfect* (teleios)
  - Absolute perfection without sin
    - If you could keep from sinning with your mouth (which is the most difficult thing to control), then you would be absolutely perfect (without sin), because you then could control all the other parts of your life.
  - Complete or mature
    - If you can learn to control your tongue, then you have arrived at spiritual maturity and are able to consistently use self-control in every other area of your life as well.

**Two illustrations of how something small can control the direction of something much bigger.**

**① A horses' bit**

**v. 3 - *Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so they will obey us, we direct their entire body, as well.***

- Job 39:19-25 - *Do you give the horse his might? Do you clothe his neck with a mane? Do you make him leap like the locust? His majestic snorting is terrible. He paws in the valley, and rejoices in his strength; he goes out to meet the weapons. He laughs at fear and is not dismayed; and he does not turn back from the sword. The quiver rattles against him, the flashing spear and javelin. With shaking and rage he races over the ground, and he does not stand still at the voice of the trumpet. As often as the trumpet sounds he says, 'Aha!' And he scents the battle from afar, and the thunder of the captains and the war cry.*

**② A ship's rudder**

**v. 4 - *Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.***

- Acts 27:37 - *All of us in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons.*
- Lucian (writing in the second century about an Alexandrian grain ship that was 60 yards long and 15 yards wide) - *"She was said to carry corn enough to feed all Attica for a year. And all this a little old man, a wee fellow, has kept from harm by turning the rudders with a tiny tiller."*

**Keyword:** \_\_\_\_\_ (*metagō*)

- "taking someone captive and controlling where they go"  
(literally, "'to guide in another direction" or "to lead to another place")

**Application**

**v. 5 - *So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.***

- Just like a small bit can boast of directing a large animal (with a will of its own), and just like a tiny rudder can boast of directing a great ship (even in storm), so the tongue is a small part of our body, but it can boast of directing the entire body.
- Our speech sets the direction and has great effects on our life.
- Proverbs 18:7 - *A fool's mouth is his ruin, and his lips are the snare of his soul.*
- What we talk about freely, we will ultimately \_\_\_\_\_

Douglas Moo - *“It is not so much “control” that James intends to illustrate as “direction”; as the bit determines the direction of the horse, so the tongue can determine the destiny of the individual. Believers who exercise careful control of the tongue are able also to direct their whole life in its proper, divinely charted course: they are “perfect” (v. 2). But when that tongue is not restrained small though it is, the rest of the body is likely to be uncontrolled and undisciplined also.”*

George Stulac - *“Learning godly ways of speaking will help us learn godliness in other ways. Therefore, the issue of speech should not be put off while one works on other areas of behavior. If you want purity and Christ-likeness to characterize your life, here is a valuable strategy: start with your tongue.”*

### **Sins of the tongue**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| • | • |
| • | • |
| • | • |
| • | • |
| • | • |
| • | • |
| • | • |
| • | • |
| • | • |
| • | • |
| • | • |
| • | • |

Gordon J. Keddie - *“Offending people, and more importantly, sinning against the Lord, rolls off the lips long before the hand stretches out to act offensively.”*

Where to we start in controlling our tongue?

- Determine what sins you're tempted by, find the opposite biblical virtue that you are to put on, and pursue that virtue.
- Pray Psalm 141:3 - *Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.*

Why is this important?

James tells us that our words:

- will condemn us (there will be accounting of what we said in this life)
- will control us (they will set the direction of our life)