

Control your tongue

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James 3:1-12 (NLT) Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.

³ We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. ⁴ And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. ⁵ In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. ⁶ And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

⁷ People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, ⁸ but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. ¹⁰ And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! ¹¹ Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? ¹² Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.

Introduction: Many people love platforms for the wrong reasons. They get pleasure from being in the public eye, seeking to be perceived as someone who distinguishes themselves from others.

Some, aspire to achieve excellence not only for the sake of excelling, but with the intention of being admired.

In the modern era of technology, individuals build social networks with the intention of achieving viral status and becoming an influencer, not only for financial purposes but also for some deep-down desire of finding fame.

Don't get me wrong, there is nothing inherently wrong with having a platform and becoming an influencer; but the underlying motive is important.

It was no different during the time of the Apostle James; individuals endeavored to build platforms. In this passage we see that for some people becoming a teacher in the church was a platform to be desired and pursued. Why?

The Jews regarded "teachers" (rabbis) with great admiration and gave them much honor in James' day.

I'm sure that this kind of respect for teachers was a temptation for some people to seek the role of a teacher in the church.

Of course, James is not discouraging people from becoming teachers; rather, he is attempting to demonstrate that words do matter and that we will be held accountable for what we say and teach.

He warns his readers against taking on a position for which they were not called or qualified and doing so with the misguided goal of creating a platform for finding significance and worth.

Teachers have influence. They employ their words to inspire and affect people. They can steer people in the right or wrong direction, like a ship's rudder.

James 3:1 (NLT) Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly.

James isn't implying that teachers are perfect. This would mean that no one would be qualified to teach. Teachers are no different than the students. We are all maturing and growing in the knowledge and likeness of Christ.

James 3:2a (NLT) Indeed, we all make many mistakes.

James' instruction is applicable to more than just teachers. He moves from discussing the motivation for being a teacher to something we are all responsible for: our tongues.

The tongue (Our words) is a good Indicator of spiritual health

I remember, when I was a kid, my parents would take me to the doctor for a checkup. The first thing the doctor would do was tell me to stick out my tongue. Why?

University Hospital Dr. Jacob Wolf wrote that "The tongue can provide vital clues about your overall health and be an early indicator of certain diseases or deficiencies".

In the same way, I submit, how we utilize our tongues (words) is a strong indicator of the health of the heart. It can show where we stand spiritually.

Luke 6:45 (NLT) A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.

Matthew 15:18-19 (NLT) But the words you speak come from the heart that's what defiles you. ¹⁹ For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander.

Controlling your tongue is a sign of spiritual maturity

James 3:2b (NLT) For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.

We show our imperfection and sinfulness by committing sins of the tongue. By the same measure we show our spiritual maturity by controlling the tongue.

A person who can manage their tongue and be a good steward of what comes out of their mouth can control themselves in all other aspects.

The word control that James used is the word used for the bridle that you put in a horse's mouth which you use to lead it.

This is probably why he uses the first the illustration of a horse.

James 3:3 (NLT) We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth.

The wild horse can be controlled by a small bit in its mouth. In the same way if we can control our mouth everything else comes under control. If you say you are spiritually mature let it be seen in the way you talk.

James 1:26 (NLT) If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.

Nothing gets a person in more trouble than a loose tongue.

The old idiom "loose lips sink ships" carries so much truth.

James 1:20-21 (NLT) Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. ²⁰ Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.

As someone once observed, "We have two ears and one tongue so that we can listen more and talk less."

Proverbs 10:19 (NLT) When there are many words, transgression *and* offense are unavoidable, But he who controls his lips *and* keeps thoughtful silence is wise.

1 Peter 3:10 (NLT) For the Scriptures say, "If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days, keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies.

The tongue is small but powerful instrument

James 3:4-7 (NLT) And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. ⁵In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. ⁶And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. ⁷People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, ⁸but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison.

Like a captain of a ship, we can chart the greatest of plans and goals of where we see ourselves going, but ultimately what we do with our mouth will determine our destination.

The human tongue or nature has a bent on wanting to gossip, defame and ruin others, especially when the heart of the person is filled with envy, jealousy, unforgiveness or bitterness.

When James speaks about no man being able to tame the tongue, he is not telling us that it is uncontrollable. He is simply saying that the tongue will always express what is in the heart.

Unless our hearts are changed and we grow in Christlikeness, our tongue will constantly cause us grief. The mouth speaks from the overflow of one's heart.

The way to control or tame the tongue is to have a changed heart.

Apart from the Holy Spirit's help no human being has ever been able to subdue ("tame") his or her own tongue.

The Holy Spirit wants to change our heart and heal our wounds and bring us into a right relationship with God and those around us. A healthy heart leads to a healthy tongue. The heart ultimately governs what come out of our mouth, then it is imperative that we fill ourselves with the Word of God or wisdom of God.

As Christians it is not acceptable that the words that come out of our mouth do not reflect that we are children of God.

James 3:9-10 (NLT) Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. ¹⁰And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! ¹¹Does a spring of water

bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? ¹² Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.