

What Do You Say?

Scripture Reference: James 3:1-12

- ¹My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.
- ²For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.
- ³Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.
- ⁴Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.
- ⁵Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!
- ⁶And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.
- ⁷For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:
- ⁸But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.
- ⁹Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.
- ¹⁰Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.
- ¹¹Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?
- ¹²Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.” James 3:1-12

According to statisticians, the average person spends at least **one fifth** of his or her life talking. Ordinarily, in a single day enough words are used to **fill a 50-page book**. In one year's time the average person's words **would fill 132 books**, each containing **over 400 pages!** That is a lot of talking! The power of the tongue cannot be overestimated. This passage of Scripture deals with the tremendous power of the tongue, mainly on the evil side. The description given in James 3:1-12 is one of the tongue that is **uncontrolled** by the Spirit of God.

In verse 2 we are told the sign of a 'mature' Christian is one who has his tongue under control.

“For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.”

If we are able to bridle (to check, restrain, or moderate) the tongue, we can control the whole life. Our words can bring comfort and encouragement, even life, or they can bring discouragement, defeat, and even death. Today we want to give special attention to what the Word of God has to say concerning the tongue.

Note: Teachers are being specifically addressed

“My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.”

Not many believers should seek to become teachers. Why? Because they will face a stricter judgment from God.

A teacher is always telling others how to live and correcting them when they come short. In fact, a teacher is responsible for the lives and spiritual growth of those under him. God holds him or her responsible. Therefore, if the teacher fails to live what he teaches, he shall bear a greater judgment and condemnation. The teacher must live what he preaches and teaches.

Note three facts:

1. This verse stresses a pointed truth: a person should commit his life to teach only if he cannot keep from teaching. Teaching is a high calling, one of the greatest of callings. It is ranked second only to the apostles and the prophets. Therefore, it has a large responsibility and is to receive the greater condemnation by God.
2. A person is not to fear this responsibility and neglect the gift of teaching. If he is called and gifted to teach, then he must teach.
3. A teacher's main tool for work is speech or the tongue. Therefore, it is the tongue and its use that will have a great bearing upon the teacher's condemnation. The tongue is where the first great temptation that can attack teachers. That is the temptation to misuse the tongue.

There are four things about the tongue that believers must know, but especially teachers.

1. *The Tongue Stumbles and Sins Often*
2. *The Tongue is a Little Member*
3. *The Tongue is a Destroyer*
4. *The Tongue is a Restless Evil.*

The Tongue Stumbles and Sins Often

“For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.”

Note: "we all offend" (stumble, fall, sin). This includes teachers as well as other believers. No believer-no matter how great a teacher he is or who he is- they are not free from stumbling and falling. In fact, note what the verse says: "In many things" we all stumble. We do not just occasionally fall and sin; we are always coming up short before God. This includes all teachers or preachers as well as all other believers.

“What is the proof of this?” When some believers live such pure and righteous lives and walk so faithfully among us, how can Scripture say that they are always offending and stumbling? Look at the tongue; the tongue shows us. One thing can be said: how short we are of the glory of

God! In no uncertain terms, the tongue shows us that we are always stumbling and coming short. This is not to excuse us or to say that we are not to control the tongue. We are held accountable by God for every word we speak. Therefore, we must learn to control our tongues. The tongue is the way to becoming a perfect or mature and fully developed person and a person's maturity can be measured by the control of his tongue.

The tongue is the way by which we can learn to control the whole body with all its appetites and passions. If a person will learn to control his tongue, he can learn to control any passion or appetite of the body. The tongue speaks what is in the heart or mind, and it is the tongue that shall either justify or condemn us before God. This is exactly what Jesus said:

“³⁴O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. ³⁵A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. ³⁶But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. ³⁷For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” Matthew 12:34-37

The point is shocking; nevertheless the fact is a warning issued by the Lord Jesus Christ. We must always remember that the believer's warfare is spiritual and mental:

*“³For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: ⁴(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) ⁵Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and **bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;**”* II Corinthians 10:3-5

The Tongue is a Little Member

“³Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. ⁴Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. ⁵Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things...”

Consider the bit or bridle that is put in the mouth of a horse to guide and turn the horse's body. The bit and bridle are ever so small. Consider the small rudder or helm that guides a ship. It even controls the ship through the winds of a fierce storm. Note how small it is. So it is with the tongue. It is only a little member of the body, but its destructive power is great. It can **boast great things**. The idea is that of making statements that stress personal accomplishments. *“Look what I can do or what I have done.”*

A person can boast about anything and he can boast in a quiet, unassuming way or boast by **talking big**. No matter how the boasting is done, it is **destructive**: it either lowers the image of a person in the eyes of others because of his boasting or makes the listener feel inferior or less of a person than the boaster. Boasting is nothing more than vain or empty talk, but its destructive force must never be underestimated.

³For the wicked **boasteth** of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth." Psalms 10:3

⁶They that trust in their wealth, and **boast themselves** in the multitude of their riches; ⁷None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." Psalms 49:6-7

⁴**Whoso boasteth** himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain." Proverbs 25:14

¹**Boast not thyself of tomorrow**; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Proverbs 27:1

⁶But now ye rejoice in your **boastings**: all such rejoicing is evil." James 4:16

The Tongue is a Destroyer

⁵... Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! ⁶And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell."

The tongue has the power to start huge fires. The word "matter" means wood or a forest, meaning the matter or raw material of a thing. Therefore, the meaning is that a great forest is set on fire by only a little spark of fire. So it is with the tongue. The tongue is a fire that can set a whole forest of lives and relationships on fire, consuming and destroying all that lies in its path.

It also is a world of iniquity. It can cause what seems to be a world of sin and destruction when it is set ablaze. Just think about the great and terrible damage that has been done by the fire of words, rumors, tale-bearing, and sharp or cutting remarks. Think about the marriages destroyed, children disturbed, friendships damaged, reputations ruined, wars fought, fights caused, injuries inflicted, bodies maimed, promotions denied, etc. The list could go on and on, but you get the point. The tongue can be a little fire that sets ablaze and consumes a whole forest of people and relationships.

It defiles the whole body and sets on fire the whole course of a man's nature or life.

Satan himself is the igniter of a fiery tongue; therefore, any person who sets his tongue ablaze is following the tongue of Satan, of the fire of hell itself. This person demonstrates a hellish, satanic heart and not the heart of Christ. The fire of hell is never to be seen in the life of a believer. A believer's tongue is never to speak forth the fiery flames of hell's destructive words-words which are ugly, cursing, unclean, angry, divisive, unkind, suggestive, or tale-bearing.

³¹Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." Ephesians 4:31

¹Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings," 1 Peter 2:1

“¹⁸He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.” Proverbs 10:18

The Tongue is a Restless Evil

“⁷For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: ⁸But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. ¹⁰Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. ¹¹Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? ¹²Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.”

The tongue is the only creature that cannot be tamed by man and cannot be completely tamed by any man, *⁸But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*” Note that the verse says that no man can tame the tongue. **But God can!**

No man is able to tame his own tongue, not fully, not completely, not adequately, not enough to please God. Only Christ can control a man's tongue-control it so that it can be under enough control to please God. The tongue is unruly, that is, restless, uneasy, unstable, always roaming about.

“⁸But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. ¹⁰Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.”

The tongue is full of deadly poison and can bless God in one breath and curse men in the next, men who are made in the image of God.

“⁹Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.”

How inconsistent the tongue is: it blesses God and curses men. Imagine! The very same tongue that blesses is the same tongue that curses. How many sit in church on Sunday or at meals blessing God and then turn around on Monday and curse or use foul and off-colored language? It is the same tongue that does both. How restless it is! It is just difficult to hold the tongue still, and when it speaks, it is just as liable to speak some curse word as it is to speak some blessing. That should show us the extreme need to control our tongue.

“¹⁰Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.”

It is not fitting or right for a believer's tongue to be untamed. Let me share with you two illustrations:

1. A believer is just like a fountain, a fountain for God.

Does a fountain that is supposed to bring forth sweet water bring forth bitter water? It is contrary to the nature of believers to have an untamed tongue.

2. A believer is just like a fig tree.

Does the fig tree bear olives? Or a vine, figs? Just as no fountain yields both salt and fresh water. No good tongue yields both words of blessing and words of cursing. Only an evil tongue could do this.

“²³Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.” Proverbs 21:23

“²⁶If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.” James 1:26

What about our tongue? Have we yielded them to God? Or are we like the fountain that brings forth both sweet and bitter waters? Our tongues are small but mighty. How we use them can either build up or tear down. †