

Men to Men Ministry
Lesson Fourteen in the Letter of James
Warning to the called of the church

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James 3:1-12 NASB

3:1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. 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. 3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. 4 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. 5 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! 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. 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; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; 10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. 11 Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.

What seems like so long ago, I pastored a little congregation in Northern Idaho. The little town of Orofino sat in the confluence of two forks of the Clearwater River. The town was there because of two reasons: one because of vast stretches of Yellow Pine for logging and the construction of the third tallest dam in America.

The dam was funded and built by the Army Corp of Engineers in response to repeated floods. Every year just prior to the rain season which starts to melt all the upper snow pack, they would open the gates and drain one third of all the water in the dam. Loud warning horns would blast and the gates would be opened. The river below the dam would

churn and raise well over 12 feet in depth. Nothing could stop the flow. Anyone that would be on the riverside would be swept away in the mighty blast of water. Once released there was no stopping it.

Exposition

On average, a person speaks about 7,000 to 20,000 words a day. The range varies depending on the individual's personality, their profession, and daily activities. For example, someone who works in a customer-facing role might speak more than someone who has a more solitary job. It's fascinating to think about the impact of all those words! Every conversation, no matter how small, contributes to our relationships and how we connect with others. Whether we're sharing ideas, offering support, or just chatting for fun, our words really do have power. So we're talking about approximately 100 trillion words every day spoken by the human race, and **God listens to every one of them, remembers all** of them. But what's really terrifying is not the sheer volume of human words, but what the Bible says about how evil many, if not most of them are, and that's exactly what James 3:1-12 is addressing, the absolute necessity of we Christians, who James calls again and again, "My brothers", to the dangers of the untamed tongue.

Now in context we've just passed through what I call the theological center of the Book of James. James is a very practical book. It seeks to address how Christianity is actually affecting your life. What's actually going on with you now that you've heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And he's seeking to instruct Christians on what genuine faith looks like in the real world. Now he's just made it plain at the end of James 2, that faith without works is dead. If your faith isn't actually affecting what you do, then it's a dead faith, a useless faith, a demon faith.

Immediately after reminding the coupling faith and works, he addresses the tongue because there is such a powerful connection between the heart and the tongue. Who you really are as a person and what you say is also coupled. James wants his readers to know that the transformation of the tongue is essential to genuine salvation. **It may be the single greatest proof that you really are a Christian, how you use your tongue.** So we're going to draw out from the text today six reasons why all Christians must tame the tongue by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Importance of the tongue

The tongue holds significant importance in various aspects of life, from communication and expression to health and spirituality.

- **Communication and Expression:** The tongue plays a crucial role in speech and language. It helps articulate sounds and words, allowing us to convey thoughts, emotions, and ideas. Effective communication builds relationships, fosters understanding, and is key to many aspects of life, from personal interactions to professional success.
- **Taste and Digestion:** The tongue is essential for tasting and enjoying food. It contains taste buds that detect different flavors—sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and umami.

Additionally, it aids in the initial stages of digestion by helping chew and mix food with saliva.

- **Health Indicator:** The tongue can reflect the state of one's health. Changes in color, texture, or appearance can indicate various health conditions, from dehydration to more serious illnesses. Regularly inspecting the tongue can help in early detection of health issues.
- **Cultural and Symbolic Meanings:** In different cultures, the tongue can symbolize various concepts. For instance, in some cultures, sticking out one's tongue can be a form of respect or greeting, while in others, it can be seen as rude. Symbolically, it represents truth, wisdom, and communication.
- **Spiritual and Ethical Significance:** Many spiritual and religious teachings emphasize the power of the tongue. Words can build up or tear down, comfort or harm. Proverbs like "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21) highlight its potential impact. Being mindful of our words can lead to a more positive and compassionate way of interacting with others.

The tongue, though small, has a profound influence on our daily lives and interactions. By using it wisely and mindfully, we can foster better communication, health, and relationships. It is the Spiritual and Ethical significance that we focus on today.

Two and one half ounces is the average weight of the human tongue. Such a small thing The concept of taming the tongue is found in James 3 where God declares, through the apostle James, that "no one can tame the tongue" (James 3:8). The lengthy discussion about the tongue in this chapter is both convicting and illuminating. Among the things this chapter reveals about the tongue: it is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts (verse 5); it is a fire and a world of evil that defiles the whole person (verse 6); it is set on fire by hell (verse 6); and it is an unrestrainable evil and full of deadly poison (verse 7). Is it any wonder, then, that God declares that taming the tongue is impossible?

When Adam sinned, God imputed that sin to mankind, so, whether or not we want to believe it, every human being is born with a wicked heart and an evil sin nature (Romans 3:10–18). Lurking within each of us are varying degrees of hatred, bitterness, jealousy, and pride, and the tongue takes hold of these and other destructive tendencies and strikes out, often with a push from Satan. We see this every day among strangers, friends, siblings, and, worst of all, among husbands and wives, the very people who, next to their love for the Lord Jesus, should have the most love for each other (Ephesians 5:22–33).

What is to be done, then, to tame the tongue? If God has declared that "no one" can tame the tongue, how can we even begin to do so? While many people have quit smoking or drinking by the power of the human will, the problem of the heart and tongue cannot be solved by human will power. It takes the power of the resurrected Christ within us to control the tongue, and that power is available only to those who turn their lives over to Him (Romans 8:10–14). As with so many things in life, "with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

There is only One who can control the tongue. Only by God's Spirit living within us can we hope to gain control over our tongues. He convicts us when we sin with our lips, and that conviction drives us to repent and pray for more filling of the Spirit so we can avoid

further sin. As we cling to Him and yield to Him in obedience, He controls us more and more, including our tongues.

7 Keys in How to Control Your Tongue

1. Believe Your Words Truly Matter

Adam in our local men to men ministries Bible study often raises his hand to be recognized. He has come to these studies for many years and has grown greatly in his faith. He often uses personal and pointed examples of the points he would make. He is thoughtful and uses others in his illustrations of a point. His words matter. The first key to controlling your tongue is to understand and place importance in what you say. There are no throw away words. Everyone makes a difference. The difference is in that they can and do make a difference to you and those who would hear.

Words can tear down or build up **'The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.'**(Proverbs 18:21). We must realize how important our speech is; otherwise, we won't do anything to change, and we'll continue to hurt people.

2. Evaluate Your Words

Many of us are not even aware that our speech is often received as negative. We need to think before we speak and pay attention to what we are saying and how we are saying it. Before opening your mouth and unleashing your tongue, consider:

- Are most of your words complaining, critical, hurtful, disrespectful, or just generally pessimistic?
- What topics are you talking about? Are they always centered on self or what's wrong with others and the world?
- Does your conversation ever include God and others?
- The number of words you use. Are you yakking with a purpose or are most of your words frivolous? (See Mat 12:36-37). Are you giving other people a chance to talk?

I know these are tough questions but without gauging our words we can never change our words! Add to your prayer list your need to see the impact your words are having and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal your shortcomings.

3. Choose to Change

Being aware isn't enough. We must intentionally put a muzzle on our mouths! I said, **"I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth while in the presence of the wicked."**(Psalms 39:1). In as much as sin is a willful decision, so make a change in your life is also an act, a deed, a work, to do something about your words.

4. Surrender Your Heart

Jesus said the root of our speech problem is our heart. “You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 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.”(Mat 12:34-35 NASB).

Without God, we are not good (Rom 3:10). However, as believers, we have been given a new heart from which to speak. As you choose to surrender your heart to God, you are in effect, surrendering control of your tongue.

Surrender allows God to do his part and clean us, forgive us, change us. To clean out the evil, sinful past.

5. Change What's IN Your Heart

“A good man brings good things out of **the good stored up in his heart**, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. **For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of**” (Luke 6:45). When the heart is jammed full—as the phrase, out of the abundance of the heart, indicates—it has to have an overflow valve, and the mouth is that valve. The mouth is the overflow valve to what is in the reservoir.” The gates of the Dworshak dam restrains a great volume of water, but once a year it must overflow.

When we get jostled with life's challenges, our mouths will involuntarily reveal what's truly inside our hearts and minds.

What's in your reservoir? Change it by meditating on God's Word .

6. Keep Pressing Ahead and Be on Guard

It takes time to change our tongues. Believe me, this yakker has failed many times! It's one step at a time, one word at a time. Forgiveness is available, but we must do our part in confessing and repenting (i.e. trying to change our behavior—or rather our words in this case).

We also cannot ever go on auto-pilot. This motor-mouth will always have to put the brakes on the tongue! Not until you and I are completely redeemed in heaven will our words be automatically God-honoring.

7. Trust God to Do His Part

Rest assured that God will do His part to help you evaluate and change your words! You and I cannot “for if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way” (Jas 3:2 NLT). No man can tame the tongue (Jas 3:8), but God sure can—if you let Him!

Pastor Andrew always prays the same same prayer every Sunday. It is from Psalm 19:14 “**May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.**” (Ps 19:14)C. WHY WE MUST CONTROL OUR WORDS...

Remember, that our words while not retrievable can be forgiven. We will be judged by those words which we have not been forgiven. I fully realize that our words come from

our character and consequently affect our lives. Furthermore, our capacity to be used by God is directly connected to our control of our tongues.

Conclusion

I love to talk! However, quite a few years ago the Lord clearly showed me that I needed to change. It was not necessarily the vast quantity of words but the quality of my words. Sometimes I caught myself talking just to be talking. To make noise to be heard and seen by others of my own self perceived importance. My tongue was not under His control. Not only was I using too many words, but they were sometimes unwholesome. I included in my personal conversations depending upon the audience, shall we say colorful metaphors. I was reminded of Ephesians 4:29, “**Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up.**” It was close to this time of year so I made the decision to give a gift to Jesus for Christmas. That gift was my two and one half ounce tongue.

However, it was very difficult for this enthusiastic talker to follow through on my promise, but the Lord enabled me and little by little I experienced success. I noticed that my words became more purposeful and God-honoring.

The easiest way to live is to simply pick a set of rules, and then work to make ourselves follow those rules. Rule-following is easy, but inward change is not. It is easy to be a bad tree who fakes some good fruit when we need it. Jesus calls his disciples to an “inside-out” lifestyle, where the good we do comes not from external rules we strive to follow, but a heart that is tuned in to Christ, and by extension produces good fruit by default.

In Luke 6:43-44 Jesus says, “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars.”

Jesus uses the obvious example of a tree bearing the correct kind of fruit. If I want to pick apples, I am looking for an apple tree. It just makes sense. But the correct kind of tree doesn't bear the correct fruit just because it wants to or decides to. That decision is not really the tree's to make. Either it is an apple tree or it isn't. No matter how badly an apple tree might want to be a banana tree, it will still grow apples.