

## Practical Christianity; Taming the Tongue

Our sermon series is called Practical Christianity – and today I want us to talk about our words. Do you know that our words have creative power? If you want to know what you are going to be like in 5 years, just listen to what you are saying about yourself today. When you say – I’ll never get well, I’ll never get out of debt, and the list goes on... and then you wonder why you never get a good break or why your situation never changes. **WHY? It’s because you continually call in defeat.**

**Your words are a living thing! Your words build up or destroy. Proverbs 4:20, 22; 6:2 and 18:21. What you say brings victory or defeat, bless or cure our future.**

**With that in mind: Can you name the muscle in your body that receives more exercise and less control than any other? THE TONGUE**

- *Leonardo DaVinci*, one of humanities greatest minds, spent his days studying the world and the human body more than anything else. On one occasion he wrote, “And now the tongue; Ah, the tongue, no member needs so great the number of muscles as the tongue. It exceeds all the rest in the number of its movements.”
- And the Greek Philosopher *Poblius* once said, “I have often regretted my speech, but never my silence.”

**The tongue is not just an American or a modern problem; it’s caused humanity problems throughout time.** To help us understand our human condition for what it is, in Matthew 15, Jesus talks about the problem *behind* the tongue. You see the tongue is just the messenger that carries the words from the heart, our soul, (*But it does take the licks!*).

Jesus said, “*Listen to what I say and try to understand. You are not defiled by what you eat; you are defiled by what you say and do. Anything you eat passes through the stomach and then goes out of the body. But evil words come from an evil heart and defile the person who says them. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immortality, theft, lying and slander.*” (Matthew 15:10-11, 17-19. NLT)

Medically, Doctors say the tongue is only a 2-ounce, 4-inch slab of muscle and mucous membrane that enables us to chew, taste, swallow food and talk. **And even though James talks about the tongue; he’s really speaking about our heart - our will and emotions or what we refer to as our soul.**

*So let's turn to James 3:1-12.*

**Not many of you should become teachers**, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. **We all stumble in many ways.** Anyone who is **never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.**

When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

James starts this part of his letter by giving us a surprising command; he warns that not many of us should become teachers. He isn't condemning the teaching ministry; but he's *warning* people not to rush into being a teacher without thinking about the cost. **Teachers will be judged more strictly than most; not as to whether they get into heaven, but rather on their reward when Christ returns.** And the reward we receive will be based on how we build the Kingdom of God.

**Why will a teacher be judged more strictly than others? Here are 2 truths that we all should consider!**

- First, **a teacher or pastor is responsible for teaching truth - God's truth – not they're own opinions!** The words teachers or pastors say affects people's lives. How children, men or women perceive God and how people understand how God relates to them.

Teachers and pastors shape how people see God - a fable or myth, loving and all powerful, gracious or judgmental! Teachers and pastors impact people's eternity.

**That's why teachers and pastors are to teach God's truth and grace, not their opinions.** If a teacher is indifferent in his or her teaching, and only focuses on fun and fellowship or crafts, but never teaches about grace and power of God. *They deny people of the hope and help that they will desperately need.*

- The second truth is that **our words are a direct result of our thoughts.** A negative mind produces a negative mouth and a negative life. People's problems are usually rooted in how they think – which produces the problems they experience. So as Christians, we must **live the belief we claim or teach.**

**If you think that's depressing, James jumps straight into the hope that God offers.**

1. In the first part of verse 2, James turns our attention by saying, **We all make mistakes.** We stumble and mess up, we sin. In the process of spiritual growth, we all blunder at some point. James is stating the truth that we all will offend someone or stumble in our lives intentionally or unintentionally in many ways.

Let me explain; if you are growing spiritually, you must understand that it's a process of walking with God; stumbling and getting back up and moving on. **If we don't make mistakes, we cannot grow!** And we can grow by listening to a promise in 1 John 1:9, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us and purify us from all unrighteousness."* When we take the step of faith by repenting or turning away from our sins - our mistakes - we change our behavior and God empowers us in the process.

2. The second part of verse 2, James explained, **A mature, Spirit-filled Believer allows God to control his or her tongue.** That's why he said, *"If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check."* Now can anyone control his or her tongue on their own? NO!

But as Philippians 4:13 explains, *"I can do everything through him who gives me strength."* We can't control the tongue on our own, but we can through the power of God!

**By the way**, right thinking and speaking are vitally important elements to living this powerful, victorious Christian life. **James gives examples of what happens when the Christian allows God to control their tongue in verses 3-4.**

- When a **firm** hand holds the reins, a horse goes where it should.
- When a **steady** hand holds the rudder, a ship goes where it should.

Of course, James isn't talking about just "Christianizing" our vocabulary; he's telling us to pay attention to the speaking habits of our heart.

And we do this by asking ourselves:

- Do my words hurt or heal? Do they inspire or do they injure?
- Do we seem harsh and unloving, or compassionate and caring?
- Does pressure make me kind or irritable? Is the fruit of the spirit still evident in my life?

**Now in the verses 5-8, James gives us three illustrations that show the dangers of the tongue.**

**1. In verse 5, he explains that the tongue is like a small flame.**

When Fire and our tongue is kept under control... both are good and useful. But if uncontrolled, they both cause destructive chaos. For example, right now there are big forest fires in the western United States.

Of course, none of these fires would have started if the conditions were not right. The weather was dry and there was no rain, so the smallest spark started a monstrous fire. When our souls are dry and parched, *without the proper care and watering from the Word of God, regular prayer, worship and the encouragement that comes with it, our tongues can set a fire that will affect our whole life.*

**2. In verse 6, James says the tongue is a "world of evil," able to corrupt the whole body.**

Ever see a family that stopped talking to each other because of something one person said without thinking? My father-in-law went for 6 months without talking to Beth because of an angry word between them, the condition of pride and bitterness set forth a firestorm between them.

It's like all the junk in our heart seems to build up and spew out our tongues.

3. In verses 7 – 8, James changes images. He explains, we can train all kinds of creatures – from small birds to whales; **but we cannot tame our own tongue.** *It's a restless evil and full of deadly poison.* To many Christians end up with destroyed relationships and never experience the abundant, victorious life they were created for because of the poison that comes through their tongue!

*They don't understand - there is a power in them, they can't tame or control on our own. Commitment, willpower, or mind over matter cannot conquer it.*

**Only** the Holy Spirit can break the control sin has in a person's heart and becomes apparent in a loose and hurtful tongue. Paul pointed this out in Galatians 5:16, where he said to his friends in Galatia. *“Let the Spirit direct your lives and you will not satisfy the evil desires of the human nature.”* (NLT)

**There is a Cure:** As James writes, he is reminding us that salvation does not automatically change the way we live. Verses 9 – 10 show the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde tendency of our tongue.

- We can praise God in worship
- And 10 minutes after church, curse a family member or that driver who just cut in front of us. Maybe deceitfully manipulate someone, so we can get own way.

James tells us in verse 10, “This should not be.” **James saying that is hope that we can overcome our tongue through the power of the Holy Spirit!**

**Our words can be controlled by one of two sources** – the sin living in us or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The tongue only expresses the nature of what is in control. So who is in control? **To find the answer to that question, ask yourself 3 questions.**

- Do you believe in and actually trust God?
- Do you spend time with God daily, calling on God for help and strength?
- Do you confess and repent (Stop doing) the actions and holding the attitudes that build a wall between you and God?

**Jesus explained in Luke 6:45 that a person speaks out of the abundance of their heart.** But before the tongue can be tamed, the inner soul must be brought under control. To receive this help, the believer who has this on-again, off-again Christian experience must realize and admit to or confess the condition they're stuck in if they want to receive the deliverance God offers.

Only after they realize they are powerless and have confessed and by faith repented from their condition, they open themselves up to the saving grace and power available from God.

## **Prayer**

Today Jesus invites all of us to be rescued from a deceitful heart or receive the cure from a poisonous tongue. Jesus offers healing to anyone who seriously wants help, hope and salvation from whatever we allow to control our tongue and drag us down.

For those people who have been hurt by the rage of some's ungodly words or actions. For those living in anger and conflict, in hypocrisy or a dry routine religion and looking for a better way, Jesus invites you.

Isn't it time we do something? Not about what we take in, but what we give out. I pray each of us realize and receive the grace of God that forgives. Through Jesus the eternal consequences of sin are gone.

Wouldn't it be foolish to continue living with a destructive tongue and deceitful heart when the cure is as far away as Jesus who offers to deliver us to the ultimate cure He offers - - His grace and love given to us as a free gift ready for the taking.

- Pray for those who are struggling with physical and medical ailments
- Pray for us to speak differently about those maladies
- Pray for the peace and justice of our communities
- Pray for our medical professionals
- Pray for the leaders of our community, state, country - wisdom
- Pray for the upcoming election. For God's will

## **Closing blessing:**

May the Lord bless and protect you;

May the Lord's face radiate with joy because of you;

May the Lord be gracious to you, show you his favor, and fill you with His peace.'