

Name: _____

New Hope Baptist Church Bible Study
LESSONS FROM JAMES
Week 13: Faith with Words– Watch Your Mouth!
JAMES 3:1-12

Chapter 3 is an elaboration of 1:19, “slow to speak.” Nowhere is this more necessary than in the use of the tongue. Christians need help from God to speak wisely. Only then will we be able to avoid sinful speech and bring healing to the Christian community.

JAMES 3:1

Not many of you should presume to be teachers. (NIV) James taught that people should not rush to be teachers.

We who teach will be judged with greater strictness. (NRSV) Teachers will have the greater judgment.

- What Are My Motives for Being a Teacher?

Christian teachers need to be primarily models of faith.

JAMES 3:2

We all stumble in many ways. (NIV) To “stumble” means to go astray or sin. Because we are prone to make mistakes in our speech, we need to be even more careful to let God control what we say.

- He is capable of guiding our motivation, our thoughts, our very choice of words, and even the impact our communication has on others.
- The first was the weight of greater responsibility. Teachers are not just people who are mature enough not to stumble—they also ought to be those who correctly handle their failures.

•

If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man. (NIV) *Perfect* here means mature or complete.

- Many people may think that it is impossible to control the tongue, but most people haven’t even begun to try. The ability to control the tongue is the mark of true maturity for the Christian (see 1:19, “be slow to speak”).

Able to keep the whole body in check. (NRSV) The expression *in check* means “to bridle,”

- James is saying that anyone who can control his or her mouth will be able to control the rest of his or her body.

- The wisdom and love from God and the self-restraint given by the Holy Spirit will help us exercise this control.
- *When someone points out something wrong we said, or a hurtful way of speaking, our first response may be defensive. But we must learn that a true friend cares for us, including the way we talk. Are we willing to genuinely care for that person in the same way?*

JAMES 3:3-5

Bits, Rudder, Tongue - What do these things have in common?

- They are all small but very effective controllers—they each direct something much larger than themselves.
- James is building a case for the damaging power of our words.

Bits make them obey us. If a person's impulsive speech is uncontrolled, his or her whole life is headed in the wrong direction. We should let Christ bridle our mouths instead of speaking out every time a thoughtless word comes to mind.

Ships are so large. Ships were some of the largest and most powerful man-made structures known by early Christians. James drives home the point of how powerful and pivotal the tongue can be.

- We can use our speech in impulsive, automatic, and thoughtless ways, lashing out at others and passing on gossip. Without control, destruction is sure to follow.

Are You Under Control?

1. What we say and what we *don't* say are both important. Proper speech is not only saying the right words at the right time, it is also controlling our desire to say what we should not say?

Examples of an untamed tongue include: gossiping, belittling, cursing, bragging, manipulating, false teaching, exaggerating, complaining, flattering, and lying.

Before speaking we should ask, "Is this what I really want to say? Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?" THINK before you Speak

Is it T HOUGHTFUL

Is it H ELPFUL

Is it I NSPIRING

Is it N ICE

Is it K IND

JAMES 3:5

The tongue is a small part of the body. (NIV) As the bit, the rudder, and the spark, the tongue is a small but influential part of the body. Since the mouth reflects and directs our life-style, we must learn to control it. (Romans 12:1) to God.

A great forest is set on fire by a small spark. (NIV) *During the dry season in Israel, the grass, low thornbushes, and scrubs were as dry as explosive tinder. One spark could spread a wild fire.*

- *Our words have wide-ranging impact.*
- *We can't control the effects of our words.*

Satan uses the tongue to divide people and pit them against one another. We dare not be careless with our words, thinking that we can apologize later, because even when we do, the damage remains. A few words spoken in anger can destroy a relationship that took years to build. Remember that words are like fire; they can neither control nor reverse the damage they do.

JAMES 3:6

A world of evil. (NIV) The tongue is the source of all kinds of evil because of the damage it can cause in the world and bring to the rest of the Christian community.

Sets the course of nature. (NKJV) The uncontrolled tongue can set our entire human existence on fire. **This means that the tongue can destroy all the good that we've built up over a lifetime.**

Set on fire by hell. The verb implies habitual action.

- In other words, the tongue keeps on setting on fire and inflaming our passions.
- It inflames our temper
- *Flames of hate, prejudice, slander, jealousy, and envy seem to come from the very lake of fire where Satan will be punished.*

JAMES 3:7-8

All kinds of animals have been tamed by man. No one can tame the tongue. (NRSV) Proverbs 13:3 says, "He who guards his lips guards his life." So what hope is there for taming the tongue? We are helpless unless we get help.

No person can tame the tongue, but Christ can.

- The Holy Spirit will heal the hurt and keep us from lashing out. We can make sure we are in the Spirit's control by incorporating Scripture into our life and by asking the Spirit to direct our thoughts and actions each day.

A restless evil. (NRSV) *Restless* means unstable and incapable of restraint. The tongue is always capable of evil; it remains untamed throughout life. With our tongue we can lash out and destroy. **Full of deadly poison.** What we say can be dangerous and deadly, carrying poison that drips long after the words are spoken.

Excuses for Speaking Your Mind

Contemporary wisdom says that people should assert themselves and say what they really feel; speak out, rather than stifle. There are many rationalizations for the unrestrained use of the tongue. We say:

- “Somebody had to tell him off.”
- “It was good to get it off my chest.”
- “I sure gave her a piece of my mind.”
- “Maybe what I said will do him some good.”
- “I felt better for saying it.”

Instead of making excuses for sounding off, we can exercise restraint and allow God’s peace and wisdom to guide what we say.

JAMES 3:9

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father. (NIV) Praising God or blessing was a normal daily practice for Jews and Jewish Christians, thus using the tongue to curse others should have seemed abnormal.

- The blessing of God was a common practice in Jewish devotional life. “The Holy One, Blessed is He”

We curse those who are made in the likeness of God. (NRSV) We should have the same attitude of respect for fellow human beings as we have for God, because they are created in his image. Yet we have this horrible, double-sided tongue.

JAMES 3:10

Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. (NIV) James knew that followers of Christ might be capable of both praise and cursing because of what he had observed in the disciples.

JAMES 3:11

Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? (NIV) James pictures the inner being, the heart, as a spring.

What Springs from You?

Many of James’s readers knew that some springs had been contaminated by salty water, and some had gone brackish and foul.

JAMES 3:12

No spring can yield both salt water and fresh. (NKJV) The implication from this answer to the question in 3:11 is that only a renewed heart can produce pure speech. Only Christ can change us as God changed the bitter water for the people.

If the source of our thoughts and actions is the love of God in our life, then we will not be able to generate the kind of negative speech that James warns us against.

Bringing Our Speech under God’s Control