

Words Matter:
The Power of our Words
James 3:2-12

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Text Introduction: Today we begin a brand new series of study on one of the most difficult areas of the Christian life. We are going to spend the rest of July talking about our talk (our speech). Unfortunately, there is not a 3-step plan that will allow you to control your tongue. Often there does not exist enough time to stop and think what we are going to say before we speak. As in other parts of our lives we must learn spiritual principles to deal with spiritual problems.

Our text today is from the book of James. James, the author, is believed to be the brother of Jesus. Most believe that this book was the first NT book to be written. Interesting, then, isn't it, that from the earliest conception of the Church there is the need to address this matter of the tongue?

Some say that James reads like the Old Testament book of Proverbs—a book of wisdom. Indeed, we are wise when we learn to put our speech under the control of the Holy Spirit. Let's look at this text.

Text: ²for we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a mature man who is also able to control his whole body.

³Now when we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we also guide the whole animal. ⁴And consider ships: Though very large and driven by fierce winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how large a forest a small fire ignites. ⁶And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among the parts of our bodies. It pollutes the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is set on fire by hell.

⁷Every sea creature, reptile, bird, or animal is tamed and has been tamed by man, ⁸but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹We praise our Lord and Father with it, and we curse men who are made in God's likeness with it. ¹⁰Praising and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers, these things should not be this way. ¹¹Does a spring pour out sweet and bitter water from the same opening? ¹²Can a fig tree produce olives, my brothers, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a saltwater spring yield fresh water.

Introduction: Who counts these things, I will never know, but multiple sources suggest that the average human speaks between 18,000 and 25,000 words. That means that each of us speak about a 54 page book every day. That means 66 800 page books a year. If we said anything worth selling to be read, we all could be quite rich, I suppose. Oh, but how those words can get us in trouble.

And, it's not just the words we say, now it's the words we write in e-mails, on blogs, on Facebook, and in tweets.

I have seen quite a number of lists of things to think about before we speak. **Here's the problem: Who thinks before they speak?** In the heat of the moment, who is going to pause and go over the list?

However, as Christians, we are to be transformed. Not just in some areas, but in all areas.

I love the way this passage before us today is put together. First of all, let's remember something of the flow of the book of James. James has just finished what might be considered one of the most important passages in New Testament theology. James has underscored the relationship between faith and works. Basically, James, even though he would be in hearty agreement with other New Testament passages that salvation is by grace and not by works, has brought to light that where there are no works, there is no faith. From there, James seems to be suggesting that there is a similar relationship between our faith and our words.

After an initial warning to those who are teachers, James delivers three points about our words and with each point offers two illustrations. He must have been a great preacher because this is a tremendous and helpful delivery of essential truth. So, we will let that pattern guide us.

3 Convictions about the Power of our Words:

1. Our words can be brought under control.

Don't be caught off guard by this statement. Don't be confused by James' assessment in verse 8 that no man can tame the tongue. Indeed, no man can tame the tongue, but James' premise is that our tongues can and should be brought under the control of the One who is our master. That is the point of the two illustrations—one about an animal and one about a ship. The animal doesn't control the animal. The ship doesn't control the ship. Each has a master (a captain) assuring the control. In fact, notice these three truths about our words being brought under control.

- The control of our tongue is an indicator of our maturity.
- The control of our tongue is an indicator of the One who masters us.
- The control of our tongue is an indicator of how we deal with our sin.

2. Our words cause great conflict.

Chaos or disaster is the chief point of verses 5-7. As in the above principle, James illustrated this second point in two ways—a fire and the body.

- A Sin of Disproportionate Power
- A Sin of Definite Progression

Here's the progression. If we let negative talk flow from our mouths, we are going to be negative people. If we let worrisome talk proceed from our mouths, we are going to be worried people. If we let bitter talk proceed, we will become bitter. If we allow ourselves to talk about someone, sooner or later, that is how we are going to really feel about that individual.

- A Sin of Demonic Partnership

Here is the reason why our words have such power to destroy. The source is the Devil, himself.

3. Our words contradict our confession.

The pattern continues. A principle is set forth and then that principle is illustrated in two ways. The principle is that our words are used for both blessing and cursing and it should not be this way for the believer in Christ. The two illustrations are water and trees.

So What?

We have identified a great problem, now we want to learn how to deal with the problem. We will continue to do this over the next weeks, but before we go today, I want to leave you with 3 Biblical principles.

- **James 1:19—Slow Down!**

¹⁹ My dearly loved brothers, understand this: Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger,

- **Psalms 141:3—Ask God to Set a Guard over your mouth!**

LORD, set up a guard for my mouth;
keep watch at the door of my lips.

- **Matthew 12:36-37—Get Serious about this issue!**

36 I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

John wrote (John 7:46) that the Temple police said about Jesus, “No man ever spoke like this.” It should be our prayer that as we mature in Jesus, focused on being His disciples (followers) that we will become more like Him in every area, including the way we speak. Oh, for the grace of Jesus.

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;

A part of the third verse of that grand hymn goes like this:

Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.