

CORINTH CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

GUARDING THE TONGUE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE:

James 3:1-12

INTRODUCTION:

- A. According to Warren Wiersbe, a pastor friend told him about a member of his church who was a notorious gossip. She would “Hang on the Phone” most of the day sharing tidbits with any and all who would listen. She came to the pastor one day and said “Pastor, the Lord has convicted me of my sin of gossip. My tongue is getting me and others into trouble.” The pastor knew she was not sincere because she had gone through that routine before. Guardedly he asked, “Well what do you plan to do?” She replied, “I want to put my tongue on the altar.” Calmly the pastor replied, “there isn’t an altar big enough,” and he left her to think it over.
- B. The Believers that James wrote to were apparently having serious problems with their tongue. He warned them to be: (1) “Swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger (James 1:19); (2) The believers “bridleth not his tongue” is not truly religious (James 1:26) and (3) Believers must speak and act as though they were already facing Christ in judgment (James 2:12).
1. **Believers are commanded to “Be Swift to Hear”**
 - a. We should eagerly seek wisdom, exercise patience, and actively listen before reacting or speaking out of frustration.
 - b. We should always listen for understanding
 2. **Believers are commanded to “Be Slow to Speak”**
 - a. We should give others the time to finish speaking and gathering all the facts before giving our perspective. Rushing to respond can lead to misunderstandings and conflict.
 - b. We should not display a quick temper – control your temper. Take a pause to prevent blurting out harsh, defensive, words that are driven by emotion rather than wisdom.
 3. **Believers are commanded to “Be Slow to Wrath” (Anger)**
 - a. **Anger is a human emotion that can lead to sin if not controlled.**
 - o “²⁶Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: ²⁷Neither give place to the devil” (Eph 4:26-27).
 - b. **Slow to Anger** means displaying patience which is the “**Fruit of the Spirit.**” Patience refers to unwavering, steadfast endurance in difficult circumstances, to hold one’s temper for a long time, enduring pain and suffering without complaining.

c. The Believer can use his tongue to praise God

Glorify God, sing, pray, preach the Gospel, Evangelize

- The same tongue can be used to tell lies, curse and deceive others, ruin a person's reputation (character assassination), and to break a person's heart.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF GUARDING THE TONGUE (vv. 1-2)

- **“Masters refers to Teachers, Instructors”**

James warns believers to be careful about their eagerness to be teachers because teachers are held to a stricter judgment.

A. The Responsibility of the Teacher (v. 1)

1. A teacher is to tell others how to live and correct them when they fail to do so.

- Teaching and Preaching are not to be taken lightly.

2. Teachers are responsible for the spiritual growth of those under them.

- Teachers and Preachers are to teach/preach the Word of God.

3. Teachers must practice what they teach.

- **“Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully”** (Jer. 48:10).

- a. This is a warning to us against doing the work of the Lord negligently or deceitfully and failing to teach or preach **All the Counsel of God**, no matter how unpopular it might be.

- b. **The “Whole Counsel of God”** refers to the entire uncompromised revelation of God's Truth, Character, and Plan of Salvation. It covers the truth about man's fallen nature, God's Grace, and Redemption through Jesus Christ.

- **“For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God”** (Acts 20:27).

c. Do not teach/preach solely for personal gain

Money, Status, Fame, Fortune and just going through the motions but not serious about God and His work.

4. Teachers/Preachers are to be well prepared in order to avoid doctrinal errors (incorrect beliefs or teachings that deviate from the established truths of Scripture).

- **“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”** (2 Tim 2:15).

B. The Mature Person (v. 2)

1. “For in many ways we offend all” (v. 2a)

We all stumble in our speech at times – lies, flattery, complaining, cursing, gossip, incorrect story (unintentional).

2. **“A perfect man”** (v. 2b)

Those who are spiritually mature are able to guard their speech or tongue. The Believer is to be careful of his speech, not knowingly or intentionally offending his fellow Believer.

- “He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction” (Prov 13:3).
- “Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof” (Prov 18:21).
- “He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips” (Prov 20:19).
- “Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles” (Prov 21:23).

II. **THE NEED FOR GUARDING THE TONGUE** (v. 3-5)

James used three analogies to show the power of the tongue to control and direct one’s whole life and influence everything in a person’s life. The tongue is very small but influential.

A. **The Bit and the Horse** (v. 3)

A bit is placed in a horse’s mouth to guide it- to the left, right, stop, and straight ahead. The bit overcomes the wild nature of the horse.

B. **The Rudder and the Ship** (v. 4)

A small rudder (a tool used for steering) enables the pilot to steer a large ship, even through the winds of a rough storm.

C. **The Fire in the Forest** (v. 5)

A spark can set a great forest on fire:

- A bit, rudder and spark are small but very powerful. Likewise, the tongue is small but powerful. Our speech can negatively impact the lives of others. Therefore, we should never underestimate the words we speak.
- The bit, rudder and spark must be properly controlled by skilled individuals. Likewise, Believers must allow Jesus to control their tongues, then they need not fear saying the wrong things or even saying the right things in a wrong way.

III. **ILLUSTRATIONS OF AN UNGUARDED TONGUE** (vv. 5b-8)

This deals with the tongue as having the power to destroy.

A. **The Tongue is Like a Fire** (vv. 5b-6)

1. **A lit match, carelessly thrown, may ignite a forest and leave a charred mass of ruins** (v. 5b).

- A fire reportedly started in the O’Leary barn in Chicago at 8:30 p.m., October 8, 1871; and because that fire spread, over 100,000 people were left homeless, 17,500 buildings were destroyed and 300 people died. It cost the city over \$400 million. The fire started when a cow kicked over a lantern in the barn.

2. “The Tongue is Like a Fire, a World of Iniquity” (v. 6a)

- a. Marriages destroyed - Words that express Lust
- b. Reputations ruined - Words that lead to wickedness
- c. Promotions denied - Words that lead to murder and deceit

B. The Tongue is Like an Untamed Creature (vv. 7-8a)

All kinds of beasts, birds, serpents and marine life can be tamed. It is not uncommon to see tamed elephants, lions, tigers, birds, serpents, and fish.

- **“But the tongue can no man tame” (v. 8)**

Mankind has tamed all kinds of creatures – small and large, but cannot tame the small tongue. No man can control his own tongue, not fully, not completely, not enough to please God. Only the **Spirit of Christ** can assist a man in controlling his tongue so that it is pleasing unto God.

C. The Tongue is Like (Full of) “Deadly Poison” (v. 8b)

Some tongues spread poison. The deceptive thing about poison is that it works secretly and slowly and then kills. How many times has some malicious person injected a bit of poison into a conversation, hoping it will spread and finally get to the person he wanted to hurt.

IV. THE INCONSISTENCY OF THE TONGUE (vv. 9-12)

A. Evidence of the Inconsistency (vv. 9-10a)

1. We bless God and curse men (v. 9)
2. **“Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing” (v. 10a)**
 - Worshipping, praising and thanking God; and at the same time
 - Cursing and destroying men who are made in the image of God.

B. Rebuke for the Inconsistency (vv. 10b-12)

“My brethren these things ought not so to be” (v. 10b)

1. **A fountain cannot give forth two kinds of water** – sweet and bitter (salt water and fresh water – v. 11) at the same time. It must be one or the other.
2. **A fig tree cannot produce olives nor a grapevine produce figs (v. 12).**
In nature, a tree produces only one kind of fruit. The tongue should produce only one kind of fruit – **Good Fruit.** – **This must be out nature: Good Speech.**

- Our speech should be consistently good or pure. No good tongue produces both words of blessing and words of cursing – only an evil tongue can do this.
- This is told of a Christian man whose most intimate friends could not find out about his religious affiliations. One day a friend of his, on being told that he belonged to the church, exclaimed, “why I have know him intimately for some years, but I never dreamed he was a Christian!” He could not possibly conceive how the mouth that spoke so violently and indecently of his fellow men could be opened in church to praise and bless God.

V. GAINING CONTROL OF THE TONGUE

A. **Honest Prayer** – for problems with our tongues (Ps 141:3)

- “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Ps 141:3).
- “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile” (Ps 34:13).
- “I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me” (Ps 39:1).

B. **Confession of Wrongful Speech** (1 John 1:9)

- “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

C. **Praise and Express Thanksgiving** (Ps 34:1; Col 3:15-17)

- “I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Ps 34:1).

D. **Speak to Build Up and Encourage** (Eph 4:29)

- “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph 4:29).
- “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer” (Ps 19:14).

CONCLUSION:

- A. Lord, set a watch upon my lips, My tongue control today;
Help me evaluate each thought, And guard each word I say. - Hess**
- B. “The only thing you can do with the truth is to tell it and then live it.” – Fred Shuttlesworth**
- He believed that guarding the tongue meant speaking with righteous courage, never with personal hatred.
- C. Romans Road (Rom 3:10, 23; 5:8; 10:9, 13)**



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“the word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isa 40:8).