

Feb. 9, 2014

The Untamable Tongue James 3:1-12

James 3:1-12

INTRODUCTION:

The book of James was written by James, the half brother of Jesus. If a title or theme were given to this book it could be called *Practical Christianity*. James is very concerned about what it means to be a genuine Christian. In a very simple manner, gives us a practical lesson on how we are to conduct ourselves as a Christian.

James tells us that a true saving faith will always be active and obedient and will result in a changed life. You can't come to Christ and continue to live the same.

If someone claims that they know Jesus Christ as their Savior and put their faith in Him and yet turns around and does the same things that they used to do, it is a **FALSE** claim.

A true saving faith will be manifested by **works**.

James 2:26

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

²⁶ For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

James IS NOT saying that to be saved, we must add works to our faith.

James IS saying that if you have a **saving Biblical faith** it will be **active and obedient** and it will be **manifested by works and a changed life**.

ILLUSTRATION:

Imagine with me that Carol and Roy were called to go out of the country on a missionary assignment for six months. They tell us not to worry about all of the things that need to be done around the church. Since they have been doing many of the daily things, they will send regular emails to the church to tell us what needs to be done and when to do them in their absence.

In the first email Roy says that the south roof is in bad shape and needs to be replaced. He suggests that we contact contractors and get quotes, choose the best quote and get it repaired as soon as possible. He also tells us to change the furnace filters. Carol tells us to clean up inside the church and set up the room for the Guys and Gals. **KEEP THE FAITH**, and we will see you when we return.

Many other emails are sent over the following months with encouragement and jobs that needed to be done.

Carol and Roy returned six months later and find:

- The ceiling in the church wet and hanging down into the chapel
- The heat is not working
- The floors are a mess
- The trash cans are overflowing
- The Guys and Gals group no longer meets at the church

It appeared that none of the work that was requested had been done.

Disturbed at what they see, the following conversation takes place between them and us.

“Have you been receiving our emails?”

“Yes.” We replied.

“Well, what have you been doing?”

eMail 1: Sentence 6 said “Keep the Faith”. From our studies we felt that was the most important instruction to us. “We were very FAITHFUL. We read your emails with great interest and prayed about it. We even started a Friday night email study and broke the wording apart to fully understand what you were telling us. Many of us committed much of it to memory, in fact Neal and Gene can recite all of the emails by heart. There is great information in those emails and we have been enlightened by them.”

“OK, you studied about them, prayed about them, and memorized them, but what did you DO about them?” they asked.

“DO? Well, we didn’t DO anything. We just remained FAITHFUL”.

James is talking about a FAITH that does something; an ACTIVE FAITH. If we have a saving faith, we will **actively** be **living for Christ**.

Prayer

BODY:

We study God's word and learn HOW we are to live, but too often, I'm afraid, we only take away a conceptual understanding and we DO little. Sometimes we need a list of practical things that we can DO to get beyond the conceptual understanding and have a true SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD.

We listed areas of our life that we could improve upon during the Wednesday Night Bible Study that could generate this active and obedient faith that James is instructing to us to have.

Or put in another way, how to avoid studying, praying, and memorizing scripture (as in the email illustration) and not DO anything. We came up with a short incomplete list.

- Evangelism (saving the lost)
- More Bible Study
- More Prayer (Morning, Meals, Night, etc.)
- Helping the Needy
- Being a Light (Letting our Light Shine before Men)
- Refrain from deeds of the flesh
- Improving on the fruits of the Spirit

Galatians 5:19-23

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

If you were James and getting ready to write Chapter 3 and you wanted to write about the key area of spiritual growth that truly marks genuine Christianity, what would you write?

We know that if we are in Christ, our lives have turned from worldly ways to a new life in Christ. What area of change do you feel would deserve the top shelf?

This would be an area of change that is so difficult that when a person does well in this area then it is clearly a testimony that something supernatural is going on.

What would you consider was the key indicator of a saving faith?

For me, I would most likely consider it an area of **self-control** which is one of the fruits of the Spirit, because self-control is so difficult for all of us.

This selected area of self-control would be such that if we could succeed in it, everything else would be a downhill struggle.

If I was James writing chapter 3, I might consider:

1. Immorality.

Immorality is one of the sins of the flesh. We are so inundated with sex, nudity, pornography, adultery, and “adult content” in this society that is impossible to completely avoid. Satan has made it very attractive.

2. Food related issues.

We all have struggled with over eating and being overweight or in some cases under eating as in anorexia.

3. Finances.

We live in a society that thinks we need everything now. **Spend, Spend, Spend.** We live by the credit card. Unfortunately, Christians do not fare much better than the world in this department. We don't trust God to supply our needs. We just go out and buy it.

James did not choose any of the above. He chose **the TONGUE.** ([The little member behind our dental work.](#))

The power of speech is one of God's great gifts to mankind. It is one of the things that make us different than the rest of His creation. Let's hear what he has to say in verses 1 and 2.

James 3:1-2

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

3 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.

James will make four points in verses 1-12 concerning the Tongue.

In verses 1 and 2 he says that

I. Controlling the Tongue is a Key Mark of Spiritual Maturity.

If we want something to look for to find out if a Christian is real, James says to check out what he says, because the ability to control the tongue is a key mark of spiritual maturity.

Remember James was writing to the Jews that were scattered due to persecution. He is warning them that too many want to be teachers. The Jews felt that if you wanted to be a person that everybody should look up to, they should be a Rabbi (or teacher). If you liked getting respect from people and liked receiving honor at the table, you would be a Rabbi.

Maybe what James is saying here is that they might want to be teachers for the wrong reason. They have motives that are not good. He is not saying that teaching is bad, but be sure that you are knowledgeable of what you are teaching and that you are teaching for the right reason.

Each of us has different spheres of influence in our Christian lives. We might be a new Christian, or a kindergarten Sunday School teacher, or a minister, or elder, or head of a large evangelistic team, or the dean of a Bible College. Paul says that we need to pay attention to what we **teach or say** because as our sphere of influence increases we are increasingly subject to a stricter judgment.

This can be a little discomfoting. We are told that all of us will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment for what we do and say. I am using my tongue to preach from James 3:1-12 this morning. I will be held more accountable for preaching than any of you for listening at judgment for this message.

You ask, why should I be more accountable? James answers it in verse 2. "For we all stumble in many ways." James includes himself here. He says that we all sin. Sometimes we just go out and sin. Other times we are trying to do the very best we can and we still sin.

The reason that people cannot get along is because we all are selfish. I want what I want because I am selfish. You what you want because you are selfish. We cannot get along because of sin.

For we all stumble in many *ways*

Now pay attention to what he says in particular. He goes from general to specific.

If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man,.

James says that if you can make it without sinning with your speech, you are mature, you are perfect.

This is our first point. **Controlling the Tongue is a Key Mark of Spiritual Maturity.** James says that if you are mature spiritually, not necessarily perfect and never sinning, you are **able to bridle the whole body as well.**

Remember the introduction? James is saying that you can handle the tongue, you can handle any issue of self-control.

- Issues of morality
- Issues or gluttony
- Financial issues
- Lust, Anger, You name it.

If you can handle issues of the tongue, everything else is a step down.

James 3:3-6

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

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.

James uses three illustrations that make the same point. That is the second point of this message.

II. Failing to Control the Tongue has Devastating Consequences.

The first illustration talks about how a small bit can direct a very large horse. In verse four, he talks about how a small rudder can direct a large ship. Again, in verses 5 and 6 he talks how a small fire can burn a large forest.

All of these illustrations demonstrate how something very small, if not controlled, can have devastating consequences. I will first use the rudder illustration.

The Bismarck was a German battleship in WWII that no one could touch. The British had just built a battleship named the Hood. Both battleships were considered pretty much indestructible. The Bismarck and the Hood started toward each other. Before the Hood could even start firing, the Bismarck sunk the Hood. The British had nothing that could sink the Bismarck. One day the Bismarck was cruising and a reconnaissance plane happened to spot it. They radioed for all ships to come to the area. The only thing England had has an antique plane with torpedoes that were incapable of penetrating the hull, even if they hit it, but they tried anyway. The brave pilots dove down in heavy fire and kept dropping torpedoes. Nothing damage was sustained to the Bismarck until, by sheer chance, one of the torpedoes hit the rudder and jammed it. The Bismarck circled and circled because it had no control. This allowed plenty of time for the allies to bring everything they had and have fun picking the battleship apart bit by bit until it sunk. What the Germans found out is that if you lose control of the rudder, you lose control of the ship.

James also uses fire to illustrate the devastating consequences of an uncontrolled tongue.

In 1871 the O'Leary barn caught on fire. The story is that a lantern was kicked over by a cow and a spark started a hay fire. The fire spread from the barn into Chicago. By the time that the fire was put out, 300 people had died, 17,500 building and businesses had burned, and 100,000 homes were in ashes. The total damage was estimated at \$440 million. That would be billions today.

Satan can use the tongue to destroy ministries. All it takes is for someone to say the wrong thing. It could be intentional or unintentional. It may be mistaken identity. That is passed on from one person to another. Feelings or lives could be hurt or damaged. Just like a fire, a single comment can rage into an uncontrollable situation and bring an entire ministry down.

James 3:7-8

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

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.*

This is the third point.

III. Man is unable to Control His Own Tongue with His Own Strength.

We have all seen wild animals that have been tamed. Elephants, tigers, killer whales, etc.

James tells us that no one can tame the tongue.

No matter how hard we try to tame the tongue, we cannot tame it. Does that mean that we just quit trying? No, we are to try to avoid sin. We can look to Christ and ask that the Holy Spirit help us.

Only Christ was able to control the tongue.

1 Peter 2:21-23

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

²¹ For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²² WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; ²³ and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;

Christ could have said, "You are having your fun now. I will get back at you on Judgment Day. He trusted in God the righteous judge.

The fourth and final point this morning is found in verses 9-12.

James 3:9-12

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

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.

IV. To Control the Tongue Requires a Change of Heart.

The tongue is a mere symptom of a greater problem. How can it be that one moment you are singing “Oh, How I Love Jesus” and 15 minutes later you are screaming at someone who pulled out in front of you on your drive back home?

Nature is not that way. We cannot have a faucet that when you turn it on it gives fresh water. Turn it off and back on and it has salt water. Turn it off and back on and it has fresh water. Nature does not work that way.

Verse 12 says that you cannot get olives off of a fig tree or figs from a grape vine.

James is saying that the root of problem is much deeper than the tongue. Why is that? He has spent all this time on the tongue. What do you mean?

Let’s see what Jesus said.

Matthew 15:18-19

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁸ But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

If I have a problem controlling the tongue, the cure is not to be quiet. “Every time I get mad, I will just bite my lip”. That will not solve the problem.

That is like going to the kitchen and turning on the faucet and the water tastes like salt water. Your wife says, “Honey, the water tastes like salt water”. So, he goes out and buys a new faucet and replaces the old one with the new one.

When the water is turned back on, the water still tastes like salt water. The faucet does not change the water, it reveals what is in the lines.

Our tongues reveal what is in our heart. The tongue is a window. It exposes our character. When you speak, your character is on display. Our tongue offers an invitation to anyone who listens to you to see what is in our heart. The reason that we can bless God and curse men is that we have what the Bible calls a divided heart.

CONCLUSION:

You can go through life buying every speech book available. You can bite your lip every time you are frustrated. That doesn't help.

We will never gain control of our tongue until we have a radical change of heart.

Mark 12:30

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³⁰ AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.'

The key to controlling the tongue is not to be a master of self-control. The key to controlling the tongue is yielding the heart. We need to give our hearts to God. We need to say to God that we are going to worship Him and Him alone. That is what it means to control the tongue. It requires a radical change of heart.

I. Controlling the Tongue is a Key Mark of Spiritual Maturity.

II. Failing to Control the Tongue has Devastating Consequences.

III. Man is unable to Control His Own Tongue with His Own Strength.

IV. To Control the Tongue Requires a Change of Heart.

God, through the pen of James is telling us there is only one thing we can do. If we are serious about controlling our tongue, we must yield our hearts completely to Christ.

The Family of God

I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God.
I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood!
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod,
For I'm part of the family, the family of God.