

**INTRO:** The worth of the tongue can be invaluable, the harm of the tongue can be devastating – is it not amazing that so much good and so much evil can come from the same source, the tongue? James was a very practical writer and he spends a good deal of time speaking about a person learning to control their tongue for with the tongue James says in verse 9, we can “**bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men.**” With the tongue we can destroy friendships or establish friendships, lift a brother or sister up when they have fallen or destroy them when they are down, give encouragement when needed or destroy the future of an individual, push one to greater achievements or give them a reason to give up, glorify God and further His kingdom or destroy His reputation in the eyes of another, increase love or increase malice, show our wisdom or show our ignorance, be a friend or be the enemy, be an asset or be a liability. Complaints, gripes, gossip, slander, cursing, sarcasm, pride, disrespect can all come from the tongue as well as blessings, encouragements, compassion, concern and love can be expressed from that same tongue. How easy it is to speak evil of someone and how difficult it often appears to speak well of someone. Many a person has been destroyed by the tongue of another, many a church have split because of an evil tongue, many have split the family, many have entered a fiery hell because of the tongue, many have been miserable because of the tongue. There appear to be some that are not happy unless they are condemning others in some manner for they speak ill of others so much, it is seldom if ever that they think of anything good to say of anybody. Such is a miserable and often lonely place to be – the friend of none and the critic of all.

- A.** Don't know if you have thought about this before but an uncontrollable tongue can be one of the greatest evils there is for often the affairs of mankind are put in confusion cause someone opens their mouth. Even the apostle James says it is difficult to tame the tongue, but he does not say it is impossible – but it would seem he stresses that with Divine grace and assistance it is not an easy thing. Couple of things that are obvious:
- a. It takes work to control the tongue – we must think before we speak and we must ask for God to help us so we do not do irreparable damage from our speech. Though a person can be forgiven, those words that should not have been spoken can never be taken back and oftimes they will come back to haunt the person who uttered those words. What you say often speaks louder than what you do, so we must be careful in our speech.
  - b. Few people enjoy being around a person who continually finds fault with everything and everybody except those that are of the same character. I have been around people that complained about everybody so much that I felt like I needed a shower after I left them. I believe in telling the truth, but I do not believe we must find fault with everything – why not look for the good instead of the bad. It will make others feel better and you will feel better yourself.
- B.** James tells his readers that men may stumble in their walk with the Lord, but the one who can control his tongue will be able to control his entire body and that is maturity in the Lord. Now to be fair, we need to look at the context of this verse for in verse 1 where James is speaking about those that are teachers and how some have spoken words that will bring a stricter judgment upon them for they have caused dissension and confusion in the church because they have usurped authority where it was not necessary, especially in the area of the doctrine of the Gospel. He is saying to not try to give yourselves the air of teacher or judge with a condemning attitude, rather learn to speak with the humility of the learner. Do not try and bring everyone to a particular standard if the standard you live by is not God's standard. This Greek word rendered “perfect” in verse 2 here means an adult or mature person and in the context is speaking about one that is thoroughly instructed in the doctrines of the Gospel, not stumbling themselves nor causing others to stumble. But I believe we can use this quite accurately to cover our entire speech for certainly regulating the tongue is something that must be done.
- a. It would appear that the one who seeks only to find the faults of others and then arrogantly pass censure upon them as if they were in control of complete knowledge of the issue, may expect God to be as extreme in marking what they say and do and perhaps pass judgment upon them. After all, even if the person is living in sin, we need to remember we too, were there at one time so instead of passing condemnation, why not show a little compassion and Christian love and help. This is not saying to overlook intentional and continual sin in the life of another but it is not necessary to destroy everything we see. One that spends their entire life by condemning are usually trying to raise their opinion of themselves in their own minds by bringing everyone else down. Let us be more severe in judging ourselves but more charitable in our judgments of others. Let us make sure when we do judge that those judgments are based upon the Word of God and not our personal ideas or preferences of what another should do.

- C.** Note the importance of controlling the tongue for James say if we control it, then we can control our entire being. The professing Christian that cannot control his tongue is not where he/she should be with the Lord but if he can keep that under control, it is an indication of a sincere Christian.
- He uses a couple of example to show the power of the tongue in an individual. Though it is a small thing, a small bridle makes the horse go the direction of the one controlling the bridle and the one that controls the small rudder can make the large ship go in whichever direction he desires. So controlling that small thing known as the tongue can have huge results.
  - The one that uses the bridle is in charge of the horse and the one that controls the rudder controls the ship. The one that controls the tongue controls the body in which the tongue is located thereby guiding and ruling its direction in life. The uncontrolled horse will run and throw its rider; the uncontrolled ship will venture off course, get lost and perhaps run adrift. That small member of the body known as the tongue is capable of doing great good or if left uncontrolled, great harm and destroy that person or another.
  - In verses 5,6 it is compared to a little fire that is placed among a great deal of combustible material and soon the small fire increased to a huge conflagration which eventually consumes everything before it. Can we not understand why the devil is called a liar and the father of lies – look at the destruction it can cause.
  - Be careful about retaliation as well for this will destroy quickly and often completely. When you feel besmirched by someone's words, the first reaction is to strike back with words of your own, then they retaliate, they you retaliate and before you know it, a friendship has been destroyed or a soul has been lost. Sometimes the best reaction to inflammatory remarks is silence. After all, one will not continue to argue if there is no one to argue with.
- D.** So, because of the great damage it can cause, we are instructed to "tame" the tongue, get it under control, make it do what you desire it to do. Mankind can tame all the fierce animals that exist, but the tongue is a different animal. And it would appear that James is under the opinion that without supernatural grace and assistance, the tongue cannot really be tamed. It is not impossible, it is just difficult and takes great care, watchfulness, pain and prayer to keep it under control. A person that has found Christ, a person that has given their life to Christ is a person that will be careful to control that most harmful of things, the tongue.
- THERE WAS A WISE PASTOR ONE TIME THAT KEPT A SPECIAL NOTEBOOK AND HE LABELED IT "COMPLAINTS OF MEMBERS." WHENEVER ONE OF HIS PEOPLE BEGAN TO CRITICIZE ANOTHER'S DOINGS, HE WOULD SAY, "I'LL WRITE IT OUT SO I CAN TAKE IT UP WITH THE BOARD." THE SIGHT OF THE COMPLAINT BOOK AND THE READY PEN HAD ITS EFFECT. THE CLERGYMAN KEPT THE BOOK FOR 40 YEARS, OPENED IT HUNDREDS OF TIMES, AND NEVER HAD OCCASION TO WRITE A LINE IN IT.** You see, when we realize what we say will be made public, we are not as quick to speak without thinking.
  - John Milton in *The New Dictionary of Thoughts* wrote, **"THE COMMAND OF ONE'S SELF IS THE GREATEST EMPIRE A MAN CAN ASPIRE UNTO, AND CONSEQUENTLY, TO BE SUBJECT TO OUR OWN PASSIONS IS THE MOST GRIEVOUS SLAVERY. HE WHO BEST GOVERNS HIMSELF IS BEST FITTED TO GOVERN OTHERS. HE WHO REIGNS WITHIN HIMSELF AND RULES HIS PASSIONS, DESIRES AND FEARS IS MORE THAN A KING."**
  - The Psalmist in 34:13 stated, **"Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile."**
  - George Sweeting: **CONTENTIOUS TONGUES HAVE HINDERED THE WORK OF GOD A THOUSAND TIMES OVER. CRITICAL TONGUES HAVE CLOSED CHURCH DOORS. CARELESS TONGUES HAVE BROKEN THE HEARTS AND HEALTH OF MANY PASTORS. THE SINS OF THE TONGUE HAVE BESMIRCHED THE PURE WHITE GARMENTS OF THE BRIDE OF CHRIST.**

**CONCLUSION:** Back in the 1980's there was a movie based upon the book *The Indian in the Cupboard*, in which a young boy has a magic cupboard with a magic key and it transformed his plastic cowboys and Indians into real people who are 3" tall. Little Bear is an Iroquois warrior from the time of the French and Indian Wars and a good guy fighting on the side of the British. The little boy wants to help Little Bear fight his enemies, so he takes some modern day army men, puts them in the cupboard, and brings them to life. He borrows their machine guns and grenade launcher and gives them to the Indians to use. Then he sends Little Bear back to his time. Little Bear and company soon surround their enemy with a circle about fifty yards across, they open fire. The only trouble is they're used to bows and arrows that shoot short distances, not twentieth century weapons and some of them are killed by friendly fire. Often it would appear our tongues have the same effects for as we use them in a way that is incorrect, we end up wounding our friends and perhaps destroying our friendships and even our relationship with the Lord. I am not accusing anyone here of such misuse of the tongue, but I do know that it is easy to speak quickly, without really thinking anything through, and end up hurting those that you did not intend to hurt and would have never done so if you had just stopped and thought before you spoke. James said in verse 10, **"...from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way."** Are you striving to be the person God has called you to be, are you striving to be as perfect as it is possible for a child of God to be, then watch what you say!