

## FAITH IN ACTION IS MINDFUL OF THE TONGUE

**Greetings:** Jesus communicates in the Sermon on the Mount that evil speaking toward others can be condemnable just as murder, **Matthew 5:21-22**. Jesus certainly understands the power of words and how, if not careful, what we say can be used to build up—or tear down. In just the first two chapters of this *Faith in Action* book, James has already mentioned one’s speech **12** times! In this third chapter, James focuses his full attention on the tongue and writes some of the most compelling expectations for those who follow Jesus and how they use this small part of the body that can have eternal ramifications.

**JAMES 3:1-12** Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Now if we put bits into the horses’ mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their entire body as well. <sup>4</sup>Behold, 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. <sup>5</sup>So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race. <sup>8</sup>But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup>With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; <sup>10</sup>from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. <sup>11</sup>Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? <sup>12</sup>Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can saltwater produce fresh.

We may not pay much attention to what we say or how we speak, but God’s word has much to say about our speech—giving many instructions, admonitions, and warnings. There are almost 900 verses in Proverbs; 142 of those give instructions concerning our speech: we should tell the truth, not make rash oaths, neither gossip nor slander, be thoughtful in what we say, use discretion in how we answer, take time to answer carefully, and not relate confidences entrusted to us. Only through Christ’s help and molding can we even begin to bridle the tongue, since the tongue is really a heart issue. When Jesus is Lord of the heart, He is Lord of the lips also.

### TEACHING IS SERIOUS BUSINESS... 3:1-2

- Was James seeking to discourage people from teaching?
  - No! “His words were meant to remind us of our responsibilities, rather than to deter us from our duties.” (A.F. Harper)
  - Teachers were respected and needed, then and now. Paul repeatedly included teachers in the same discussion as apostles and prophets.
  - We all teach in various ways, whether we wear the title of teacher or not.

- There are dangers in teaching! James warns of “stricter judgment” (greater condemnation).
  - Paul wrote of some who wanted to be teachers but didn’t understand either what they were saying or the things they taught. **1 Timothy 1:7**
  - Peter warned of false teachers, **2 Peter 2:1**, as does every New Testament book—except Philemon.
  - “...False teachers, because of their being unqualified, must be reckoned among the most vicious and destructive influences in the whole history of Christianity.” (Burton Coffman)
  - “The damage that wrong teaching may cause is indicated by what James later says of the tongue. Untold damage may result. We see it everywhere to this day. This text about the judgment that teachers shall receive cannot be impressed too deeply upon all who teach today, whether professionally or as volunteers.” (R.C.H. Lenski)

❖ **How might teachers be especially tested or prone to sin in what they say?**

### **THE TONGUE HAS GREAT POWER... 3:3-8**

- The tongue has the power to direct. **3:3-4**
  - James illustrates this power with an example of bits, verse **3**, and a rudder in verse **4**.
  - Small bits in the mouths of large horses control them.
  - A very small rudder turns and guides large ships—even against the wind.

❖ **What example have you experienced or seen where the tongue helped direct someone or a group in a powerful way?**

- The tongue has the power to destroy. **3:5-8**
  - Small fires may set entire forests on fire.
  - The tongue makes great boasts and is dangerous.
  - The tongue may stain the whole body or set on fire the entire course of life. **Proverbs 26:20-21**
  - The tongue *is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.* **8**
  - The book of James speaks of at least 7 defiling sins of the tongue.
    - Blaspheming, boasting, cursing others, quarreling, speaking against others, complaining, swearing.
  - The book of Proverbs has dozens more!

❖ **What example have you experienced or seen where the tongue destroyed someone or a group in a powerful way?**

*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.*  
**Proverbs 18:21**



- No one can tame the tongue. **8a**
  - In verse **7**, James takes his readers to the zoo to show us the wild animals that have been tamed by mankind.
  - Man's tongue, however, has yet to be tamed {*damazo*}.
  - The only other time *damazo* is used in the NT is in reference to the demoniac in **Mark 5** where *no one was strong enough to subdue him...* but after his encounter with Jesus, the people were able to *report what great things the Lord has done.*
  - Our glorious Lord Jesus Christ can help in matters of the tongue.

## THE TONGUE MAY BE USED IN OPPOSING WAYS... 9-12

- To reach the goal of sinning less with the tongue, see that the heart is filled with good. **Matthew 12:34-37**
  - The mouth blesses our Lord and Father yet curses His children?
  - Fountains are consistent. They spew forth whatever is dwelling inside.
  - Water is life giving—our words should also be words of life!
  - Let's ask God to purify the well and spend time in His perfect Word, allowing that seed to produce precious produce from our lips.

*The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; The fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook.* **Proverbs 18:4**

### Discussion Questions:

- ❖ What are some ways in which we all teach?
- ❖ How much time or attention do you give to your speech?
- ❖ How is your speech either Christ-like or a hazard to your spiritual walk of faith?
- ❖ Compare and/or contrast and comment: "*If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.*" **3:2**; "... *no one can tame the tongue.*" **3:8**
- ❖ What blocks or interferes with our taming the tongue? What hinders you personally?
- ❖ In what way do you consider the tongue "...*a restless evil and full of deadly poison?*"
- ❖ Complete the following for yourself: With my tongue, I ought to \_\_\_\_\_!

### Prayer

