

**TITLE: CONTROL YOURSELF!**

**TEXT: James 3:1-12**

**INTRO:** One of the major points to bring out of David's prayer in Psalm 141 is his request regarding his mouth –that God would help him watch what he said. This is a very wise, mature request for anyone, considering the power of the tongue. No wonder James said, "*be swift to hear, slow to speak*" (**Jam 1:19**). This morning we're going to look at the tongue's potential.

**I. THE DESTRUCTIVE TONGUE (JAMES 3:1-12):**

- A. The control of the tongue (**v. 1-4**)  
(**v. 1**) Not many should be teachers, knowing that teachers will receive greater judgment (more strictly). But contextually this isn't *why* they shouldn't be teachers. Why not then? Because teachers must use **words** to teach! And (**v. 2**), words can offend!  
(**v. 2**) We offend (cause to stumble) in many ways – words aren't the *only* way, but if you can control your words, you can control your whole body (**Prov 10:19**–"*In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise*").  
(**v. 3-4**) Examples of large bodies controlled by small things: We control horses w/a small bit; we control ships w/a small rudder.
- B. The power of the tongue (**v. 5-6**) (in controlling the whole body)  
(**v. 5**) Like the bit or the helm, *the tongue is a small member, but boasts great things!* Consider how great a forest is burned by a cigarette butt! Or, remember how much OK farmland was destroyed in the same way during our drought! \*Then, consider how many marriages, friendships, and families have been destroyed by fights that started with a few words!  
(**v. 6**) "*The tongue is a fire!*" It burns us up in iniquity. "*It defiles (stains, soils) the whole body, and sets on fire the course (wheel, circuit) of nature ('genesis' - beginning, generation, life).*" Adam introduced sin into the world, and from there it spread like a cancer. And James is saying that it spreads **by the tongue!** It sets your life is on fire "...*by hell.*" Very serious problem!
- C. The failure of the tongue (**v. 7-12**)
- (**v. 7-8**) No man tames it! We've tamed all creatures, but not our own selves! And it's a pretty serious animal to tame, being *full of deadly poison*. (he explains this in v. 9-10)
  - (**v. 9-10**) The same tongue praises God and curses men! Anything ungodly that comes out of your mouth is inconsistent with God's nature, and clearly inconsistent with praising God. Does God accept this person? "...*ought not so to be!*"
  - (**v. 11-12**) Consistency! The water is either good or bad. The tree only produces *one* kind of fruit! Our inconsistencies will destroy us with fire of hell! Hard to make it any plainer!

**II. THE CONSTRUCTIVE TONGUE:**

- A. It can provide the words by which people can be saved (**Acts 11:14**–"*words whereby thou and thy house shall be saved*")!
- B. It can keep you out of trouble (**Prov 21:23**–"*Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles*"). How?...
- C. It can turn away wrath with a soft answer, or stir up anger with grievous words (**Prov 15:1**).
- Consider Rehoboam's foolish choice (**1 Kings 12:7**–"*if thou wilt be a servant unto this people...and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants forever*"). But Rehoboam followed Solomon's *actions*, not his words!
  - Consider Gideon's wise answer (**Judges 8:1-3**–"*What have I done in comparison of you? Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?*"). Also David to Saul – "thou pursuest a dead dog, a flea" (**1 Sam 24:14**).
- D. It can use knowledge properly to help others (**Prov 15:2**). Consider Paul's address to the idolatrous (but ignorant) Athenians (**Acts 17:22** – "*I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious ('very religious' – meant as a compliment).*" He did not use his knowledge to chastise them for the "unknown god" altar. Rather he used it as an opportunity to teach them the truth.
- E. It can heal and provide life, or crush the spirit (**Prov 15:4**)! It is very powerful!

**III. THE TRAINED TONGUE:**

- A. Know the source of the tongue's words – the heart (mind). \***Mt 12:34-37** – out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh... every idle word to be judged. Sometimes things just "fly off the tongue," but if we're honest about it, we'll see that many times those words were either planned in the mind, or at least the mind was predisposed to saying negative things.
- B. The heart is inclined toward wickedness (**Jer 17:9**–*deceitful above all things & desperately wicked; Mt 15:18-19*)
- C. The heart can be cured by filling it with good!
- Bible reading/study. The more you're in it, the more you change.
    - Eph 4:25 – put away lying & speak truth
    - Eph 4:29 – let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying.
    - Col 3:8 – put off...filthy communication out of your mouth
  - Prayer (as in Psa 141) – David trusted in & relied on God through prayer.
  - Inclining your heart toward your mission. If you want to watch what you say, direct the source of your words (your mind, not your tongue) toward what you're supposed to be doing. When you leave the house, are you thinking about your Christian example and the people you may be able to influence? Are you thinking about who you're going to see today and how you might be able to start a good conversation? If you're going to be with brethren, are you thinking about ways you can help or edify them? How might my words encourage a brother or sister?
  - ☺ Smile! Isn't it difficult to say something negative when you're smiling? Have you ever even tried to?! Smiles can even be heard (over the phone). Smiles are positive, uplifting, and contagious! ☺
  - Avoid those situations that bring out the worst in us. Avoid profane & vain babblings (**1 Tim 6:20**). "*Refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness*" (**1 Tim 4:7**). These are word wasters. They either bring out the negative language, or, even when you maintain positive words, they're wasted on someone not interested in the truth.

**CONCLUSION:** The tongue has great potential for evil or good. Remember that its source is the heart. Get your heart right daily through Bible study, and through prayer. Ask God to help you in the areas in which you're weakest.