

A Final Word James 3:9-12

A lady went to her doctor for an examination. She felt terrible. After looking at her chart, the doctor got a very serious expression on his face and said, 'Ma'am, I hate to tell you this, but you have rabies.' She then proceeded to get out her notebook and started making a list. The doctor asked what she was doing, making out her will?' She said, "No, I'm making a list of people I'm going to bite."

Our words can have a damaging bite like rabbi. We have spent two messages talking about the destructive nature of the tongue from our passage in **James 3** and he isn't finished yet. From **verses 1-2** we looked at a stern warning given by James to those who are teachers. We noted that teachers have tremendous influence over others by their lips and by their lives. They have the power of persuasion on others in what they say and in how they live.

I have shared this little poem on other occasions, and it is fitting once again.

You're writing a gospel a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do and the words that you say.
Men read what you write, whether faithless or true.
Say, what is the gospel according to you?

Verse 2 reminds us that we stumble in many ways, meaning that in one way or another, we all sin. We don't have to look very far to see how true that is. The Bible is clear on that point from verses like: **Proverbs 20:9** "Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin'?"

II Chronicles 6:36 "There is no man who does not sin."

I John 1:8 "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us."

They are a reminder that we need to consider our ways, but **verse 2** also tells us that we need to consider our words. James says that if we can keep our tongue from speaking evil, we would be perfect and capable of keeping our lives in check. Scripture

shows us the importance of asking God to set a guard over our mouth to not sin in what we say.

Psalm 34:12-13 "Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies."

Psalm 39:1 "I said, 'I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence.'"

Psalm 141:3-4 "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips. Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies."

Last week from **verses 3-8** we considered that our words really do matter. They not only influence others, they have a tremendous impact either for good or evil. Words have destroyed reputations, marriages, businesses, churches, even countries. When it comes to the power in the tongue, we considered some examples. Though it is small in comparison to the rest of the body, it is like the bit we put in the mouth of a horse or a rudder that steers an enormous ship. The tongue can set or determine the course of a person's life.

Paul describes the unrighteous as having throats that are an open grave, tongues that practice deceit, the poison of serpents is on their lips with mouths full of cursing and bitterness (**Romans 3:13-14**).

Proverbs 18:21 says that the power of life and death are in the tongue.

James not only talked about the power of the tongue, but he also spoke about the perversity in the tongue. It not only corrupts the person, it is also catastrophic to the person. But as destructive a force the tongue can be, I left you with some ways that we can use the tongue for good.

Speaking words of affirmation.

Speaking words of blessing.

Speaking words of comfort and compassion.

Speaking words of depth.

Speaking words of edification.

Speaking words that are fitting.

Speaking words of grace.

Speaking words with humility.

Keep in mind that God already knows what we are going to say. **“Before a word is on my tongue You know it completely, O Lord.” (Psalm 139:4)** That should be a good deterrent to keep us from saying something we will later regret.

Or how about this admonition from **Psalm 19:14**. **“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”**

From **verses 9-12** that we will consider today, James gives us a final word on the tongue. He leaves us to ponder a paradox. He first speaks about the inconsistency in the tongue.

I. THE INCONSISTENCY IN THE TONGUE – vs. 9-10

To be inconsistent is to be out of harmony, not in agreement, incompatible, contradictory.

James tells us that there are two things that are incompatible, two things that are inconsistent, two things that are not in agreement and they have to do with the tongue. The first thing we note is that the charge is evident.

A. The Charge Is Evident – vs. 9-10a

He could not be clearer about the inconsistency than he is. **“With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s image.”**

The phrase **“our Lord and Father”** is only used here. It’s as if James wants to remind us of our relationship with God who is Lord and sovereign over our lives as the One who is to be in control of us if we have truly relinquished our rights and plans for His. And then secondly, James points out the personal and intimate relationship we have with God who is also our Father. As our Father he cares about the personal needs we have and gives compassion and guidance. As Father, we should submit to His care and will for our lives, which in

this case includes what we say.

James begins by saying that the tongue is used to offer praise to God. The word used here for bless or praise in the Greek is eulogeo and our English word eulogy. In the Greek, eu means well or good and logos means word or something said. A eulogy then, means to speak well of someone or to commend a person.

We generally associate a eulogy as something given at a funeral in speaking well of the person who has passed away. This past week at Robyn’s mom’s visitation and funeral people spoke well of her as they reflected on her life and character. So a eulogy is a way to honor or commend someone.

In the verse before us, James is saying that we honor or praise God with our words. One of the things that distinguishes us and makes us unique from the animal world is our ability to speak. Praise is the highest function of speech. The Westminster catechism begins by asking what the chief end of man is. The answer is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Our original purpose for being created was to give praise to God and in eternity that will be our delight as we gather around His throne with all believers and all His angelic host and cast before Him our praise.

Isaiah 6:1-3

Revelation 4:6b-11

Revelation 5:13-14

But it isn’t just in heaven that we will praise God, that is our privilege here on earth as well. Maybe you remember this little chorus.

Praise Him, praise Him.

Praise Him in the morning,

Praise Him in the noontime.

Praise Him, praise Him.

Praise Him when the sun goes down.

Or the more familiar song

Praise God from who all blessings flow.

Praise Him all creatures here below.

Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts.

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen!

From **Philippians 4:6-7**, Paul exhorts us to offer thanksgiving to God when we offer our requests and petitions in prayer.

We wake up in the morning and praise God for keeping us safe in the night and for the new day that is ahead of us.

We praise Him at the end of the day.

We praise Him for the resources to buy our groceries and pay our utilities, mortgage, gas for our vehicles, safety during a trip, healing from an illness.

We look up at night and praise Him for the beauty of the night sky filled with all those stars.

We look around and praise Him for the beauty of His creation, the vastness of His handiwork in the varieties of plants and animals and birds.

We praise Him for our job, for our family, for new life in the birth of a child into our family, and even give praise for the homegoing of a loved one.

We praise Him for His Word, His salvation, His grace and mercy, forgiveness, our eternal home.

We offer praise in testimony, in song, and in the proclamation of His Word.

We praise Him for the opportunity to gather as believers to worship together.

The Psalms offer so many reasons for praising God.

Psalm 7:17 “I will give thanks to the Lord because of His righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High.”

Psalm 9:1-2 “I will praise You, O Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all Your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.”

Psalm 21:13 “Be exalted, O Lord, in Your strength; we will sing and praise Your might.”

Psalm 22:22-23a “I will declare Your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him.”

Psalm 28:7 “The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to Him in song.”

Psalm 34:1-3 “I will extol the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together.”

Psalm 35:28 “My tongue will speak of Your righteousness and of Your praises all day long.”

Or consider the songs we just sang.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Since I met this blessed Savior
Since He cleansed and made me whole
I will never cease to praise Him
I'll shout it while eternity rolls.
He touched me, Oh He touched me
And oh the joy that floods my soul.
Something happened and now I know
He touched me and made me whole.

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We can spend a month of Sundays talking about reasons God deserves our praise all the time and only scratch the surface. But James point isn't about our need to give God praise, though He is entitled to it and he would be right in exhorting us to give it.

Notice what else James has to say in **verse 9**. “**With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men.**”

Let that thought sink in for a moment.

We have offered praise to God in our singing.
We have offered praise to God in our giving.
We have offered praise to God in our fellowship.
We have offered praise to God in our study of His Word.

But James says with the same mouth we used to offer God praise, we have turned around and cursed man.

The word curse doesn't just mean saying something profane as in swearing. The word literally means

doom, or to express great loathing for someone, to hate, to decry, condemn, criticize or despise. To curse means to want some harm or punishment to come on someone for something they said or did.

They say confession is good for the soul. So let me offer a confession. I'm guilty. Chances are, so are you.

I will be driving down the highway, doing the speed limit, and some guy will go screaming right on by doing at least 90. But what's even more irritating is when he cuts right in front of me to get over and exit at an off ramp. I will admit that on more than one occasion I have hollered at him, out loud as if he could hear me, "I hope you get a ticket."

There's the inconsiderate person who cuts in front of us at the checkout lane and we have to give him a piece of our mind. It's generally not the right piece.

There's the neighbor who lets his dog do his business in our yard or dig in our flower bed and we have to let them know about it.

There's the person who is rude on the phone or who takes the parking spot we have been patiently waiting for or all the hundreds of cars that rudely drive in the lane that is closing causing the whole thing to get bogged down.

There are any number of scenarios we find ourselves in that whether we admit it or not we have expressed our disdain expressed words of loathing, some condemnation for a perceived atrocity toward us or toward someone we care about.

The point James is making is that in one moment we can be praising God and the very next moment we can be uttering some curse against someone else hoping they will get a dose of their own medicine. It could be the person we just spent an hour praising God together in worship. It could be the person we were witnessing to the day before but today you call him out for letting his dog run around your yard. Or you are listening to the Christian radio station with your little fish bumper sticker all the while hollering at the guy who just cut you off.

But James isn't done. It's not just that one minute

we are praising God and the next minute we're giving someone a royal tongue lashing. He reminds us of a very important truth. The person we are so angrily berating is someone who has been **"made in the image of God."** In essence James is saying that when we curse someone, we are really cursing God. Noodle that for a while. It doesn't matter whether that person is a believer, we have all been made in the image of God. Even in our fallen state we still bear His image.

A professing Christian let loose with a verbal tirade at work. Embarrassed he turned to his partner and remarked he didn't know why he had said that. He said it wasn't in him. His partner wisely said it had to be in him or it wouldn't have come out of him.

Let me remind you that Jesus said what is in the heart will come out the mouth (**Matthew 15:18**). We are charged with inconsistency. We praise God and yet curse men made in God's image.

Chuck Swindoll so poignantly reminds us that "the fruit of our lips finds its source in the root of our soul."

Alexander MacLaren adds this thought to ponder "Cursing destroys the reality of the verbal blessing of God. If a man says both, the imprecation is his genuine source, and the other is mere wind."

I had to look up the word imprecation. It means the oath, insult or curse you just uttered. What MacLaren is saying then is that your true self, your true heart is in the insult you just spoke and that your praise is just empty platitudes. The tongue reveals what we really are. So to curse a man who is made in God's image is to curse God whose image is stamped in the person. That ought to be a strong incentive not to use profane or insulting words in our speech about anyone. There is a lot of truth and wisdom in what our mothers used to tell us: **"if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all."**

We probably don't give it much thought, but it should bother us that in one moment we can praise God and in the next we can curse man who has been made in God's image. Instead, we should consider

the words of Paul who said we should **“bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not.”** (Romans 12:14)

The evidence is clear. We have been charged with being inconsistent with our tongue. James then says that the change is necessary.

B. The Change Is Necessary – v. 10b **“My brothers, this should not be.”**

In other words, it’s a moral inconsistency for both praise and cursing to come out of the same mouth. The tense suggests that this is something that keeps on happening. That it’s incompatible and unharmonious.

The Phillips translation states it this way:
“this is the sort of thing that never ought to happen!”

The Amplified Bible adds some additional insight.
These things, my brothers, should not be this way [for we have a moral obligation to speak in a manner that reflects our fear of God and profound respect for His precepts].

What we say to others or about others behind their back should reflect our love for and commitment to God if in fact He is our Lord and Father.

The problem, as we have discovered, isn’t with the tongue. It’s with the heart. The tongue is just the conduit that speaks what is in the heart. The tongue is the pipeline that delivers the message that was in the heart, which is the source of our words. If we want to control what the tongue says we need to remedy the heart. That’s why the words of **Proverbs 4:23** is so vital to our walk with the Lord.
“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”

If we really took to heart the fruit of the Spirit in **Galatians 5:22-23**, allowing Him to develop those characteristics in our life, then our words would be more gracious. Our words would reflect the character of Christ. **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”**

If we took to heart that we are a new creation in Christ and that the old has passed, the new has come our words would build up and not tear down.
Ephesians 4:29-5:2, 4, 8-10

Paul also writes in **Galatians 5:16** that if we **“live by the Spirit we will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”** That includes our words.

If we say we love God, then change is necessary. James then uses nature once more to illustrate for us how absurd it is to think that we can praise God and curse men.

II. THE ILLUSTRATIONS ABOUT THE TONGUE – vs. 11-12

It is time for Robyn to put in the garden. She will plant tomatoes and green beans and a few other vegetables. When she goes out to pick some juicy tomatoes for our bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwiches she won’t find onions instead. When she picks beans for a green bean salad, she won’t expect to find heads of cabbage hanging from the plants. When she wants a bell pepper, she won’t find ears of corn. Nature is consistent. When you plant tomatoes, you get tomatoes. When you plant green beans, you get green beans. When you plant peppers, you get peppers.

James says you won’t expect to get two types of water from the same source. You won’t get both fresh water and salt water from the same spring. His audience would have been familiar with these springs. The springs around the Dead Sea were salty, bitter, and noxious. But just north of there they could find freshwater springs that were clear and sparkling. They wouldn’t expect one hour to find saltwater coming out of a spring and then an hour later to have fresh water from the same spring.

He adds that a fig tree wouldn’t bear olives or a grapevine bear figs. The root of the tree will be evident in the fruit of the tree. To put it another way, the product is consistent with the source. Essentially James is saying that what is impossible in the natural world, ought not to be in the spiritual world. If you love God, show it in your speech

toward others. It should not be natural to curse others and praise God.

Jesus said by their fruit you will know them.

Matthew 12:33-34 “**Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil? For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart.**”

The Bible tells us that when we are saved, we become a new person, that the old person is dead. As a new creation in Christ, there is an expectancy that a change will take place in our lives, a change will take place in our speech that should follow our salvation. Having God’s Spirit in us should make a difference in every area of our lives. If we want to control our tongue, we need to be controlled by God’s Spirit. We need to let Him control our heart.

If we struggle with controlling our tongue, we need to start with a look at the heart.

Psalm 139:23-24 “**Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way of everlasting.**”

Psalm 51:10 “**Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.**”

If we are led by the Spirit we won’t gratify the sinful nature. That refers not only to our actions, but also to our tongue as well.

Warren Wiersbe adds “As we fill our hearts with God’s Word and yield to the Holy Spirit, He can use us to bring delight to others, and we will be refreshing fountains and trees.”

John MacArthur writes “It is unacceptable and an intolerable compromise of righteous, holy living. When God transformed us, He gave us the capacity for new, redeemed, holy speech, and He expects us, as His children, to speak only what is helpful and right...A hateful heart cannot produce loving words and works.”

Colossians 4:6 “**Let your conversation be always**

full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

Are your words filled with grace or are they grievous?

By what fruit do you want to be known?

How will you guard your heart and tongue this week?

Will your words demonstrate that you are led by the Spirit or by your flesh?