

THE TESTINGS OF YOUR FAITH

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Part 4: The Test of the Tongue



How many times have you said something and immediately you knew that you hurt someone deeply?

The old saying, “You can’t un-ring a bell” is just like that. James now turns from the importance of works to the importance of words in the Christian life.

Though good works are important he now points out that our speech, the words we speak, must be seen in a new light—words can be very harmful! It is not the small tongue itself that James is blaming, it is the improper thinking and feeling and then the subsequent damaging words that are spoken that James is addressing. How many times have you been regrettably startled by what you just said? How many times have you said to yourself, “Did I say that?”

A. THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Our words are powerful—they can build up and encourage others or tear them down. They can even ruin our testimony as followers of Jesus Christ. So why is it so difficult to always control what we say?

B. JAMES 1:26-27; 3:1-12

James 1:26-27

“If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”

James 3:1-12

“Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

³ *When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the*

parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

C. GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1. (1:26) Why is it sometimes so difficult to control what we say?

2. (3:2-4) James uses vivid imagery to explain why controlling our tongues is the key to spiritual maturity. How is the tongue like a horse's bit or a ship's rudder?

3. When are we most likely to say something that we regret later?

D. APPLICATION

Before you speak, ask yourself the following five questions:

1. How would my words affect _____?
2. How would I feel if I were being spoken to in the _____?
3. Are the motives behind my words pure, or do I have a _____?
4. I need to think twice before I speak when I am _____.
5. Am I using _____ language or _____ language?