

# Ministry From James-01

by Dwight Pentecost

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*The tongue is a powerful and destructive force that can change the direction of a life, and it is only through faith that we can control it and use it for good.*

**Duration:** 32:29

**Scripture:** Ecclesiastes 10:13, James 3:1-2, James 3:8-12

**Topics:** "Taming The Tongue", "Christian Living"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher uses two illustrations to emphasize the power of the tongue. The first illustration compares the bit in a horse's mouth to the control a person can have over their own body by controlling their speech. The second illustration compares the small helm of a ship to the ability to control the direction of one's life through the words they speak. The preacher then moves on to discuss the importance of controlling the tongue and the destructive power it can have. He warns against the harm that can be caused by gossip and negative speech, using the analogy of a fire that destroys everything in its path. The sermon concludes with the reminder that the tongue has the power to build up or tear down, and it is important to use it wisely.

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## Transcript

The return to the third chapter of the book of James. We want to look tonight at the first twelve verses of this portion of the Epistle. It would be well if we read this portion before we consider it.

My brethren, do not many masters or teachers, knowing that we shall receive a greater condemnation. In many things we offend all, but if any man offend not in words, the same is a perfect or mature man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body.

Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, for this the reveler, the governor, lifteth. Even so, the tongue is a little member of most of great things. Behold, our greater matter, little five fingers.

The tongue is a fire, a whirl of iniquity. So is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and seteth on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beast, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed as mankind, but the tongue can no man tame.

It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith blessed be God, even the Father, and therewith cursed be men, which are made after the humility of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing.

My brethren, these things ought not so to be. For the fountains send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter. From the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries, either of vine, fig, so can no fountain yield salt water and salt.

May God's blessing be added to the reading of this portion of his life. So, James is continuing his instruction of believers concerning the life of faith. He wants to show us that faith operates in a realm over which we, by nature, have no control.

Faith operates to bring unruly members of our bodies into subjection to the will and the word of God. This is one of the outworkings of faith, and James is going to deal with a very practical problem of the believer and his tongue. He begins this chapter by giving a word of warning.

As he says, My brethren, do not many masters, or, as the margin has it, do not many teachers. Or, if I may paraphrase it, do not covet the privilege of teaching. The connection between this and what follows is that teaching is communication of truth, usually orally, and it involves the speech and the tongue.

He's dealing here with a possible misuse of the tongue. We will covet a position that gives us a position of a teacher, so that as we communicate orally, we're exercising authority over those we teach. In the word of God, when we have the ministry of teaching or the gift of teaching presented to us, it's presented as a gift that carries authority with it, and the one who is taught is putting himself under a teacher.

The relationship between teacher and student, or teacher and disciple, is very akin to the relationship between master and servant, and the one who comes to be taught is laying aside his own thinking and his own interpretation and his understanding of a truth, and he submits himself, submits his mind to a teacher so that the teacher's business is to mold minds. One, therefore, who is in a position as a teacher is molding life. Now, there is honor that goes with the position of a teacher.

We've referred to it often in dealing with the Gospels, the life of Christ, that among the Jews, the rabbi who was the teacher was held in high, high esteem. Perhaps only the priest himself would be given more respect and more honor than the rabbi. Why? Because the Jewish concept was that the scriptures are unintelligible, God has a message for us, but we have to depend on the teacher for all that we know about God.

So the one who taught them the scriptures or taught them about God was held in high esteem and respect. So that to address a man as rabbi was to address him with a high title of reverence and respect. And those rabbis in the Jewish system enjoyed the prominence and all the privileges and the side benefits that went with being recognized as a rabbi.

And many times, some of the Jewish leaders came to Christ and they addressed him as rabbi. Now, he wasn't a rabbi in their system, and they often ridiculed him because he hadn't been to their school. And yet, they felt they were paying him a compliment.

Now, when a man is in a position of respect, a position of prominence, it places responsibility upon that individual. There is no opportunity without responsibility, and when God gives one privilege, we are held responsible for the privileges that are given. Now, these people wanted the honor and the authority and the prestige that went with being recognized as a teacher.

But they wanted it not to mold minds and inform minds. They wanted it for personal promise. They were purely selfish in their desire to be teachers.

And so, James warns them, do not covet the position of a teacher for the honor that goes with it, because I want to warn you that those who are in the position of teachers are going to be held responsible by God for the discharge of the privilege that has been given to them. See, no opportunity without answerability or responsibility. And so, he says, we shall receive the greater condemnation.

We're going to be held responsible before God, and if I desire to teach so that I can get authority over you or I can build myself up in your estimation that I can be held in honor or esteem, I am using that privilege selfishly. And when God will judge me at the judgment seat of Christ, he will not judge on the basis of my act that I taught and commend me because I taught. He will examine me on my motive.

Why did he teach? And if I will be turned inside out at the beam of Christ, as 1 Corinthians 3 and 2 Corinthians 5 teach, which reveals that I did it for self-glorification, there will be what James calls here judgment, condemnation. We must remember that when God gives us a privilege, he holds us responsible. So, these people wanted to use the tongue to promote themselves, and a way to do it is to put themselves in the position of a teacher.

And so, they are misusing the tongue. Now, that, I see, is the connection between what James says in verse 1 and what he says in verse 2 and down through verse 12 where he deals with the misuse of the tongue. Many things we all offend.

We all offend. But there is a mark of maturity and that is that the mature man bridles his whole body. He brings his body under subjection to the authority of God and to the word of God.

The mark of a mature man, according to James, is that he is able to exercise self-control over every desire. He is able to exercise self-control over every word as well as every thought. It is a sign of immaturity that a man abandons himself to unrestrained desire or appetite or unrestrained sleep or unrestrained thoughts in his thought life.

And when he uses the word perfect, as it is in my translation, where James says, the man offend not in words the same as a perfect man, he's not speaking of sinless perfection. He's talking about having outgrown childhood to come to maturity. You see, a child doesn't know how to wait.

A child doesn't know how to restrain himself. What he wants, he wants right now. What he thinks, he just babbles without thinking of the consequences or the effects of it on someone else.

But when a man can bring desire under control and sublimate those desires to something higher, when he considers his speech before he blurts something out and refrains from what would offend another, he's showing self-control, which is a mark of maturity. So, while in Hebrews chapter 5, where we deal with a question of maturity, one's knowledge of the word is a test of a mature man. Here in James, one's ability to control his tongue is the mark of a mature man.

The individual who prides himself on saying what he thinks, a man who prides himself on his bluntness is showing his immaturity, and that's the problem that James is dealing with. I think there are two marks of a mature man in the first two verses. The first one, he's able to speak, and that would parallel Hebrews 5. The second mark of a mature man, he's able to control his speech.

These are good tests as to how far along we are up the ladder of spiritual maturity. Now, James, in verse 3 and down through verse 12, is going to move on to deal specifically with this matter of the tongue. He's going to, first of all, in verses 3 and 4, describe the power that is in the tongue.

We put bits in the horse's mouth that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body. He's going to use two illustrations of how powerful an insignificant thing can be. The book that you put into the horse's mouth is insignificant in comparison with the size of the horse.

A man does not have the physical power to control the horse. He can't do it. The horse can resist the will of the master, and yet when you slip that insignificant little bit into the horse's mouth, that weak master is able to control the direction in which the horse goes.

The bit is insignificant, but it can bring the entire strength of that mighty animal under the control of one who is teeny in comparison to the horse. Then he uses a second illustration, verse 4, to hold a stick, which though they be so great and are driven of a fierce wind, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor wishes or desires. Once again, he's using a graphic illustration, and here is the sailing vessel with the sail furled, and there can be an angry storm, and you raise this ship before that wind, and no man could change the direction in which the wind takes that ship.

He would be utterly helpless to try to get out and push the power of that ship into the direction he wanted it to go. But he stands in that ship and just turns the helm a little bit, and what happens? That ship changes its direction immediately. A small helm can change the direction of that ship, driven by a mighty wind against which a man is held.

Now, he's using a teaching that man would never have power to control a horse and a ship under full sail given by a fierce wind, and yet man is in control. How does he do it? Not by kicking his strength against the strength of the horse or the ship, but he does it by a small, insignificant kick. A kick or a helm.

Now, what does he try to say? That a man can have the whole course of his life changed by a carelessly spoken word. His tongue can change the course of his whole life. While it is a small member in comparison to the rest of the body, it is that which, quicker than any other member, can change the direction in which that life goes.

So, first point, the power of the tongue that can change the direction of a life. Then in verses 5 and 6, he speaks of the destructiveness of the tongue. The tongue is a little member and boasts of great things.

Behold how great a matter a little fire can do. A forest fire started with one spark, and that which burned the mountainside and blackened thousands of acres didn't begin as a great conflagration out of control. It started with one spark that was out of control.

The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. So is the tongue among our members, that it defiled the whole body and set on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell. It is a pleasant statement when he says that the tongue set on fire the course of nature.

May I make a suggestion as to what he has in mind here? In dealing with natural man and the sin nature, the natural man doesn't seek to build up another at all. He seeks to destroy. And the sin nature is always degenerative or destructive.

And let's start the sin nature on this process that ends in destruction. The tongue. If you want to destroy me, how's the best way to do it? Start a bit of gossip.

Someone wants to destroy our church. What's the best way to do it? Start a little gossip. And that gossip, spreading and developing, will ultimately do its natural work of destroying.

And what starts that destructive process? The tongue. The tongue. So, in verses 5 and 6, by using the figure of five, he's trying to show how devastating and destructive the tongue is.

And it doesn't take us much imagination to think of what an apt illustration this is. You start out to broil your six-kilo steak for your Sunday dinner. And you put your briquette in your power broiler.

You ignite them. You broil your steak. And you take the steak off, and the fire is still glowing hot.

You go ahead and eat your steak. You come back, and what do you find left? Just a white powder egg. That's all that's left.

Total destruction. Nothing left. And that's what James is talking about, what the tongue can do.

Then, in verses 7 and 8, the next thing he says about the tongue is that it's untamable. Every kind of beast, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tame, and act in tame to mankind. But the tongue can no man tame.

It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. He's done it with the first part of verse 8. The tongue can no man tame. It's untamable.

Untamable. And he uses an illustration, and it's the most apt one. Some people have the funniest pets.

Some people like to have a cheetah, or a lion, or something like that, or some monkey, or some wild beast. I imagine that if we stopped, you could cite illustrations of some very peculiar pets that you've known people have had. I remember once, before John and I were married, when I was still in college, way back there.

You know, it wasn't until the afternoon to visit a professor friend of hers. And we walked up through the large front yard of the house, and I noticed hanging from trees some long pieces that looked like bamboo, about three inches in diameter. They were hanging from all over the trees.

And then we went into the house and sat down in the living room, and around the inside of the house were these long bamboos. Things sitting around on tables, and just all over the place. And we visited for a while, and it came time to go, and my curiosity couldn't hang any longer, and I asked the professor what these things were, and he said, oh, that's where we keep our pets.

Pets, what are you keeping? He walked over and, with his hand in one, pulled out a snake. And they had snakes all over that place, in the yard, in the house, and these long bamboo tubes were for the snakes to live in. And they lived there, and they lived with them all the time.

I was plenty ready to terminate that visit right then and there. My first crawl to faith said, here I was, sitting on a chair with a table right beside me with this long bamboo tube. There had been a snake in it all the time.

But you don't have to be afraid. There's pain. There's pain.

I can think of better things to do in life than spend time shaming snakes. Because that's what appealed to him, and he had them shamed. But you know what James says? He'd observed that people have some peculiar pets, and pets you would think never could be shamed or tamed.

But he says there's one thing that can never be tamed, and that's the tongue. It can never be tamed. What does he mean? He means that a man himself can never bring the tongue under control.

Now, that's important to realize. One of the best ways of gaining victory is to admit defeat, to admit we can't do it. Because when we can't do it, we turn to someone for help who can do it.

And it's important to realize what we're up against when we're dealing with this problem of the tongue. And James teaches us not that it is difficult. Get this.

James teaches it's impossible for a man to control his tongue. Will you read it again in verse 8? The tongue can no man tame. He didn't say it's hard.

But if you try hard enough, you'll bring it under control. Now, what's he trying to show us? The necessity of faith. That we've got to trust God to do what we can't do ourselves because of the impossibility of the tongue.

When we're willing to come to God and say that this tongue is malicious and it's backbiting and it's gossiping and it's slanderous and it's deprecatory of somebody else, when we confess to God what the tongue is, then faith begins to exercise itself, can exercise itself to gain justice. Or, again, in the last part of verse 8, he says that the tongue is an evil member. Not only powerful and destructive and untamable, but it is evil.

It is an unruly or an untamable, uncontrollable evil full of deadly poison. And then finally, in verses 9-12, he shows that it is an inconsistent member. You don't have a weekday tongue and a Sunday tongue in your shift years, so that you use your Sunday tongue to sing, Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.

You don't do that. You don't use your Sunday tongue, and then Saturday you're out carrying a brother in Christ Jesus. It's the same tongue that does both.

And he shows that there is an inconsistency in this physical body that has found no place else to meet. Out of the same outflows, he is blessing and cursing. Does a fountain send forth to the same place sweet water and bitter or salt water? No.

You can't go to a well and get two times the water out of that well. There's only one time to see the salty or sweet water. A fig tree will never produce olives, and a vine will never produce figs.

There's never that inconsistency found any place else to meet. Now, what's his intent? To think we're up against an inconsistency that we cannot control. We must exercise faith so that God can bring the tongue under control.

I think we need to be reminded again of the potentiality for evil that there is within everyone. To admit to God what the tongue is, then ask God to set a seal on our lips that we don't destroy a brother by unbridled use of the tongue. God, in response to faith in himself, will handle the problem that we can't handle, and will let our tongues be an instrument to build up the brethren rather than as instruments to destroy the

brethren.

Instruments to glorify God rather than instruments to destroy sin. We pray, O Father, that the Spirit of God may be pleased to use this portion of the word for our edification that we who live with this powerful, destructive, untamable evil within us might recognize the potentiality that there is there and that we might submit control of our tongues and faith to thee so that we use the tongue as an instrument of praise and blessing. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. The tumor as a result of the treatment he has had is only half the size that it was, and to him that is the most encouraging sign. He is regaining her appetite and is feeling a little stronger, so for this we can praise the Lord.

And we see that Middleton was in the hospital yesterday, was released today. They took tests. They found no malignancy in the knee and no infection.

That means they will be able to put in a new joint for her rather than freezing the joint which would pretty much immobilize the limb as the doctors had been afraid. So this is of great encouragement to her, and for this we are thankful. The surgery cannot be performed for about three weeks until they make up the new joint, Marie tells me, and so she has this week.

But at least there is this encouragement that there is no infection and no malignancy that they were testing for, and that there is need for continued prayer for her and want to remember her. I'd like to request special prayer for the Phil family. You'll have to share this together.

I did not know it until today myself, but there's been a problem with a 14-year-old daughter. She's run away for the seventh time. The Fishers were trying to minister to her, taking her into their home to try to be of help, and she left today.

This has been a great shock, particularly to Kathy, who feels the responsibility for this very, very deeply, and, of course, it is to the parents, and I think the parents need our love and encouragement, and sending means prayer, and I'd also request prayer for the Fishers. There are other families that have some deep, deep needs. We've shared so much with so many in these last days, and the needs are enough to break the heart, and pray for those who have these needs.

The Lord knows them. I won't mention any more names, so that you know. In others, you don't, but the Lord does.

Let's pray for these. We also... These things just remind me how much we need to pray for our families, that God will keep our families strong in the Lord, and all that a family is designed to be, according to Scripture. Parents are brokenhearted over children, and husbands over wives, and wives over husbands, and so on.

There's so much. And ask the Lord to work with you. These are some of the requests that have come to me, that are in my heart, and I want to share with you.

Now, what request do you have to share with us? Thank you. Thank you. Chuck Ball, the father, is in the hospital, still in intensive care.

He's still in intensive care in Jackson, Mississippi. And I know that he takes care of it for him. Okay.

The Bible fellowship, Ruth and Solomon Agnes, is in duty to prepare. There seems to be a movement to close out these religious groups from having duties to prepare this year, but it has been.

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