

Press On To Perfection In Controlling Your Tongue

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the journey towards perfection as believers, acknowledging the need to press on despite not having reached perfection yet. It highlights the importance of controlling the tongue, starting with speech as a key area for growth and transformation. The speaker shares personal experiences of seeking the Holy Spirit's control over the tongue and the impact it had on his life and ministry, encouraging listeners to press on towards perfection in their speech and character.

Scripture: Hebrews 6:1, James 3:2, James 3:8, Romans 8:1, John 3:17, Romans 7:23

Topics: "Journey to Perfection", "The Power of Speech"

Description

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Transcript

So when we hear something like that, I'm reminded of Hebrews 6.1. Let us press on to perfection. In India, as we have preached perfection and the new covenant, there are many people in other churches who accuse us saying, you guys think you're perfect. I say no.

If you come to our church building and see the pulpit, you see in the front of the pulpit it's written, let us press on to perfection. That's what everybody sees in the front of the pulpit behind which the preacher stands. And that is our testimony to the world that we have not reached it.

If we had reached it, we wouldn't be pressing on. But our testimony is that we don't sit back and say, I'm forgiven, the blood of Christ has cleansed me. I'm clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

I'm on my way to heaven and I'm not bothered about anything else. That's not the way we live. I say you folks think you're perfect, I tell them, because you're not pressing on to perfection.

We want our children to go from one grade to the next in a year. We'd be very disappointed if our child is struggling with the same subject even after a whole year in that class. And therefore the teacher feels he

needs to sit in the same class.

Imagine if he had to sit in the same class for two years. That would really disturb any parent. God is a father.

Do we see him like that as he looks at his children sitting in the same grade for five years, ten years? The disappointment of a father. I mean, earthly fathers may get angry with their children when they keep sitting in the same class, but they're disappointed. And God is not angry.

He's disappointed. The Bible says God is angry with the wicked every day. But with his children, he's not angry, but he's very sad and disappointed that, and especially with those who come to a church that preaches, let us press on to perfection and are not making some progress.

I'm not saying we should get our PhDs overnight, but at least we should move from grade one to grade two within a year. So that's a good thing to think of. Let us press on to perfection.

And in connection with that, I, you know, we can't concentrate on, we heard of so many things today, all of which are, we agree with a hundred percent. But where do we start? That's the question. So I want to recommend to you a place where we start.

Turn with me to James in chapter three. When we heard what we heard from Bobby just now, we would have to acknowledge we have all stumbled in many ways, not just one, but that's what James, the greater disciple of Jesus, he wasn't an apostle, but he was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. And he says the same thing in James chapter three, verse two, we all stumble in many ways.

And I say, James, do you include yourself? Yes. He says, we stumble in many ways, but he says, there's one area I'm trying to work on. And that is my tongue.

If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he's a perfect man. What a word that is. The Holy Spirit says, if a man does not stumble in his speech, he's a perfect man.

You read a word like that and you couple it with, let us press on to perfection. Where should we be pressing on in our speech? We use our tongue more than any other part of our body. And certainly we need to press on to perfection there.

And it says he's a perfect man. And if you can listen to this, we have trouble controlling our eyes and other passions in our body. But he says, start with the tongue and you'll be able to bridle the whole body.

People who have trouble with gluttony, not able to control the lust to eat and eat and eat. Well, start with the control of the tongue. Because it says here, I believe God's word.

If a man does not stumble in what he says in his speech, he's able to control the whole body. I want to encourage you to take that seriously. When I, for the first 16 years of my Christian life, after I was born again, that is from 1959 to 1974.

15 years, I was born again in 1959. And my life was up and down for the first 15 years. I was sure I was saved.

I had no doubt about it, that Christ had accepted me, forgiven. But my life was like the life of many Christians. You know, the children's, you know, go to a children's park, you see a merry-go-round, hour

after hour after hour, and the children are in the same spot.

There's no progress. That's how my life was in the life of many Christians. A lot of activity, a lot of listening to preaching, going to meetings, and year after year after year, and yet defeated by the same sins after so many years.

That is not God's will. That's not pressing on to perfection. There's movement, but no progress.

Movement without progress, that's a merry-go-round, and a lot of Christians are in that merry-go-round. You go and listen to their conversation in their home, 10 years after they've accepted the Lord, it's the same merry-go-round. They're in the same place, the same arguing, and quarreling, and fighting, and like it was, not much progress.

Not even much progress in the tone of voice. Now the question is, I'm not trying to condemn anybody. My question is, does this convict us? I believe it should.

You know, the Holy Spirit here compares the tongue to an unbridled horse. These wild horses, when they're captured, unless they are taught to be controlled, these horses that win races in the horse racing competitions, they are not just wild horses. They are wild horses with tremendous energy, but we have learned to submit to the authority of a jockey who sits on top of them with a bridle in the mouth and pulls it, and that's the picture used here.

We put bridles, bridle bits into the horse's mouth so that they'll obey us, and we direct their entire body with that bit in the mouth, and it says here, that's what the Holy Spirit wants to do with our tongue. Then he can control the whole body, and the other illustration he uses is a ship with a rudder. Now I've been on ships for many, many years, and I've seen the tremendous advantage of having a rudder.

I mean, even if you're in a boat, you know that. A rudder is a very, very small piece of metal at the bottom of a ship, but without it, the ship will go crashing into the land or into rocks or anything. There's only one thing that protects that ship.

It's the rudder, because you turn the rudder even slightly, the ship immediately turns in that direction. If you turn the rudder to the left, the ship goes to the left, because the waves are coming and hitting it, making the ship turn to the left. So the tongue is like that, it says.

With a small rudder, the pilot of the ship turns the ship wherever he wants, and saying that if you can control your tongue like that, you'll be able to control your whole body wherever you want. You'll be able to control your eyes, which a lot of men have tremendous struggle with. Don't begin with the eyes.

The Bible says begin with the tongue. You'll be able to control your eyes and everything else. The tongue is a small part of the body, very small, most of the time invisible, but it boasts of great things.

That's another thing. Most human beings are boasters, sometimes directly, in an ugly, bad way, awkward way, and sometimes very subtly drawing attention to themselves. Somehow, with a mock, false humility, John the Baptist said that Christ could never increase in his life if he himself did not decrease.

John the Baptist, by the way, has been one of my great heroes in the Bible. I've sought to pattern many things in my life and our ministry after his, because as he was a prophet who prepared people for the coming of the Lord, we are supposed to prepare people for the second coming of the Lord. So in that

sense, John the Baptist is a great example.

This statement of his, he must increase and I must decrease. The two are connected. If you really want Christ to increase in your life, in your character, and you have a passionate desire for that, I'll tell you what you should do.

You must have a passionate desire to become smaller, that people won't talk much about you. I remember my younger days, because I'm a preacher, I'd be a little inwardly elated if somebody quoted me, oh, Brother Zach said this. I discovered that's exalting myself.

I never said anything. It's only in my mind. Just a bit excited somebody quoted me.

Are you excited if somebody quotes you, Brother? Go down and say, Lord, I want to decrease. I'm not interested in people quoting Christ must increase. They must be drawn to Christ.

Why must you use their admiring Brother Zach? They don't grow spiritually that way. They can listen to me, sure. They must be drawn to Christ.

That's all. If that is your passion, I tell you the Holy Spirit will back you 100% because the Holy Spirit is in the business of exalting Christ, not you and me. If you're going the direction of the Holy Spirit, you can imagine how fast you'll go.

If you've got other ulterior motives too, you also should be a little prominent there for 10% perhaps. The Holy Spirit is going to reduce the amount with which he backs you. It says here, with your tongue, you can set a forest on fire.

Verse five, the last part. It's a world of iniquity. That's quite a phrase in verse six, that a whole world of sin sits inside my mouth.

We thought it was in our thoughts. It's inside our mouth. A whole world of sin comes spewing out at different times.

Then he says another thing. He says, every species of beasts and reptiles and animals has been tamed. Listen to this word, verse eight, and believe it.

No one can tame the tongue. There are people who practice yoga and Buddhism who say they have control of the tongue. Well, it looks as if externally, but I believe the word of God, no one can tame the tongue.

Because it's not a question of just whether I somehow control myself in a particular situation. You know how I've used this example sometimes. Here's a man whose wife has got a fiery temper.

One day, she's yelling and screaming at him. He very patiently keeps quiet. Doesn't open his mouth at all.

After the whole thing is over, he pats himself on the back and says, I thank God I'm not like my wife. Does it remind you of the Pharisee? Lord, I thank you. I'm not like that person over there, my wife there.

The way she loses her temper, I don't lose it. Do you hear the Pharisee when you have such a thought going through your mind or you don't hear it? And the wife who yelled and screamed, feels bad about it and goes before the Lord in the bedroom and says, Lord, forgive me, I lost my temper. Who is the public

and who's the Pharisee there? Brothers and sisters, we got a long way to go.

It could be vice versa. Maybe it's your husband who yelled at you and you thought you were a great saint because you kept quiet. It's not the mere control of the tongue.

God looks at the heart, not the tongue. I can control my tongue and have a bad attitude in my heart. God looks at the heart.

No one can tame the tongue in the right way. We praise the Lord, it says in verse nine, the same mouth with which we praise the Lord or we curse and shout. We're not cursing but we shout at people with the same tongue.

People who've been made in the likeness of God. My brother, sister, when you look at that other person, do you see that that person is made in the likeness of God? That you're shouting at a person who's made in the likeness of God. You see that? From the same mouth comes blessing and cursing.

My brethren, it should not be like that. You'll find a fountain that gives fresh water and bitter water at the same time or a fig tree that produces good olives and bad ones and so on. It's a good chapter, those first 12 verses to meditate on.

I told you I was quite a up and down defeated Christian, a merry-go-round type of Christian for 16 years and that finally brought me to such desperation, particularly during the year 1974. I was so defeated, defeated in my tongue, defeated in my thoughts that I began to spend many days in prayer, not all the time but praying frequently, fasting in prayer with one or two other brothers also who felt equally defeated and we were praying for one thing. Lord, no one can control, I was praying anyway, no one can control the tongue but the Holy Spirit can.

I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit. That was the year, I mean I prayed for that many times before but that was the year I prayed more than anything else. I know that the Pentecostals teach that if you're filled with the Spirit, you'll speak in unknown tongues.

Now I don't want to criticize all Pentecostals, there are some very godly people among the Pentecostals, I know them. I have a great respect for someone like David Wilkerson who was a Pentecostal but I have to say I don't agree with Pentecostal theology. I agree with the gift of tongues but not with Pentecostal theology and when I looked at scripture, I found that scripture didn't teach that because scripture said some speak in tongues, some don't.

It's a gift, it's like preaching, not everybody preaches, not everybody speaks in tongues but the other thing I saw was in Acts chapter 2 and you probably heard me say this before that when the Holy Spirit came, the first thing that was there, the Pentecostals say it was speaking in tongues, I say no. Speaking in tongues came second. Acts 2-4, they always say, every Pentecostal will say Acts 2-4, they spoke in tongues, I say no.

Acts 2-3, there was a tongue of fire over their heads. That's what I'm seeking. What I'm seeking is not, and I remember that year when I was seeking God, I said specifically, I said, Lord, I don't want the gift of tongues.

That's up to you if you want to give it to me or not, I'm not against it but I want this tongue of fire that was over the heads of those disciples which means a tongue that is under the control of the Holy Spirit, that's a

tongue of fire that is pure and loving in its speech, sometimes firm like Jesus to the Pharisees, you hypocrites, you generation of vipers and then also to know whom to say that to, you money changers get out of here, don't make my father's house a den of thieves. Yeah, that's a spirit-filled tongue but which can also say to the woman caught in adultery, I don't condemn you, don't go and sin no more, can comfort those who are in sin, that's the tongue of Jesus, that's a tongue of fire that can give strong comfort to people and strong rebuke, not an imbalanced, you know, if a person's always saying nice, encouraging, gentle things, he's probably seeking his own honor, he wants to always be known as this brother's so gentle and so kind and he never says anything wrong, Jesus was not like that, he turned around and called Peter, get behind me Satan, he was strong where he needed to be and that's a true Christian, there's not only grace in his life but there's grace and truth, if a person has only got grace, it's like half a body, you can't fellowship with a person who's got half a body, full body is left side and right side, grace and truth, so there must be grace in our tongue and truth in our tongue, that's the balance, so that is the tongue of fire, the tongue of the Holy Spirit who knows exactly when to speak through me words of comfort and when to speak through me words of correction and rebuke even to our children, our children need tremendous encouragement, they need correction, most fathers only give correction, don't do this, don't do this, don't do that, don't do that like the boy who was asked in kindergarten class, what's your name, he said my name is Johnny Don't because that's what he heard all the time, he thought that was his name and that's because some fathers are like that, Johnny Don't, we need to say that but you also need to encourage them, that was great, boy that was great, I'm proud of you my son, my girl, encouragement, grace and truth, the tongue under the control of the Holy Spirit and it's when I was seeking God for this, I wasn't seeking to be a great preacher, I was already pretty well known as a preacher by then but I said Lord, I want to control my tongue, I want to control my tongue especially in my home, I want to have a goal of never, never, never losing my temper 365 days of the year, not even once, that's my goal, it may not come overnight but I'm going to get there, it's like a marathon race, takes time to reach the finishing line but I want to get there because it says he who can control his tongue is a perfect man and I say I'm pressing on to perfection, it's written in the front of my pulpit, well then I must do something about it, I want to do it, I don't just want to talk by language and God met with me and filled me with the Holy Spirit in January 1975, it was just the beginning, I believe we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit every day but I know that something happened to the graph of my life, it had hit rock bottom, there began a climb and it has been a steady climb, I can see that as I look back over the last 47 years from that time to six months after that, that the first CFC church was born in Bangalore and subsequently in many other places but just like the first church was born through the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the day of Pentecost, I saw that CFC was also born through the infilling of the Holy Spirit, dear brothers and sisters, no man can control the tongue, no woman can control her tongue but he who can control is a perfect man, press on to perfection and I assure you God is there to help you, he's on your side against the devil. One last word, we like the word which says I don't feel condemned, yes there's no condemnation in Christ Jesus, God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world, I praise God for that, so if you slip up, don't be condemned but don't sit there and say God did not send his son to condemn the world, John 3 17, the second part of that verse is but to save the world, so it's true I don't want to be condemned but I also want to be saved, so here's what I want to say, Romans 8 1, there is no condemnation but before you get to Romans 8 1 to this point of there is no condemnation, go step by step, how do I get to Romans 8 1? Start at Romans 7 23, let me read it to you, I see a different law in my tongue, one of my members, waging war against the law of my mind, the law of my mind is Lord, I always want to speak what is good and Christ-like and oh boy, my tongue makes me a prisoner to the law of sin and if that happens in your life, if this cry comes out of your heart, verse 24, wretched man, wretched woman that I am, how will I ever

control my tongue, this body of death, this tongue of death, Lord I thank you, you'll help me and I believe the Lord will little by little, then you can go to Romans 8 1, there is no condemnation but if that cry in Romans 7 24 is missing in your life, don't jump to Romans 8 1, you could be deceiving yourself, may God help us.

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