
James 3:1 - 12 (NLT) ¹Dear brothers and sisters not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly.

²Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.

³We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth.

⁴And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong.

⁵In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches.

But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire.

⁶And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

⁷People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish,

⁸but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God.

¹⁰And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!

¹¹Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water?

¹²Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.

Scriptures that will help us use our words wisely:

Romans 3:13-14 ESV

“Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

Ecclesiastes 5:6 ESV - Let not your mouth lead you into sin...

Proverbs 20:19 ESV - Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbler.

Proverbs 17:27 ESV - Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-3 ESV

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.

2 Timothy 2:16 ESV

But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness,

Psalms 141:3-4 Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.....

Proverbs 30:32 ESV - If you have been foolish, exalting yourself, or if you have been devising evil, put your hand on your mouth.

Proverbs 18:21 - Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.

Proverbs 12:18 - There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 17:28 - Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.

James 1:19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

Proverbs 29:20 - Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Proverbs 18:2 A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

Word Pictures on the Importance of Our Speech

In James 3, several word pictures are used to show the importance of mature speech.

BIT	A small bit controls a large animal.	Can we control our use of the tongue?
RUDDER	A small piece of wood steers a huge ship in heavy wind.	The tongue, though small, can create grave consequences.
FIRE	A small spark unleashes a destructive force.	Do we recognize the destructive force our words can have?
ANIMALS	People can tame animals.	Can we tame our speech and our impulsive thoughts?
POISON	The venom of a snake kills its prey.	Can we keep our words from poisoning us and others?
SPRING	A spring can produce only one kind of water.	Is our speech a spring that's good or foul?
FIG TREE	Trees bear just one kind of fruit.	Is our speech bearing good fruit, or is it mixed with bad?
TONGUE	The tongue can be used for good or evil.	Does our speech reflect our Christian maturity?

Excuses for Speaking Your Mind

There are many rationalizations for the unrestrained use of the tongue. We say:

- "Somebody had to tell him off."
- "It was good to get it off my chest."
- "I sure gave her a piece of my mind."
- "Maybe what I said will do him some good."
- "I felt better for saying it."

Instead of making excuses for sounding off, we can exercise restraint and allow God's peace and wisdom to guide what we say. Our society encourages us to speak out in a thoughtless way, totally disregarding the deadly impact our words may have. Christ's attitude is for us to deal with our anger and frustration honestly and maturely but to use restraint in how we reveal these feelings to others.

Colossians 3:8 (KJV)

⁸But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

Colossians 4:6 (KJV)

⁶Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

It would do us all good to read frequently the Book of Proverbs, and to note especially the many references to speech.

- "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. 15:1).
- "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 12:22).
- "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise" (Prov. 10:19).

Yes, the tongue is like a bit and a rudder: it has the power to direct. How important it is that our tongues direct people in the right way!

Bringing Our Speech under God's Control

To help bring our speech under God's control we can:

- Count our blessings. By focusing on the positive, we will take away the anger and bitterness from our spirit that leads us to make negative comments or accusations towards others.
- Get in touch with the love of God. As we allow God to satisfy our spiritual needs, we will have less of a need to strike out at others.
- Write our thoughts in a letter instead of lashing out. We can pour out our inner feelings, and then not send the letter. Instead, we should pray over the letter and ask God to give us a change of attitude and spirit.
- Wait before responding to a comment, criticism, or piece of gossip.
- Make five positive comments to every negative one that we make about someone else.
- Treat everything we say as a gift to another person. We should ask: "Are my words a gift that I truly want to leave in their hands?"

Psalms 39:1 (NLT) ¹ I said to myself, "I will watch what I do and not sin in what I say. I will hold my tongue when the ungodly are around me."

Psalms 19:12 - 14 (KJV)

¹² Who can understand *his* errors? Cleanse thou me from secret *faults*.

¹³ Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous *sins*; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

Proverbs 13:3 (ESV) ³ Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

Proverbs 21:23 ESV Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble.

MONDAY MORNING MOMENT: Action Step

"Try to make five positive comments to every negative one that we make about someone else...watch what happens next"

Ephesians 4:29 (NLT)

²⁹Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

Ephesians 4:29 (KJV)

²⁹Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.