

# Taming the Tongue

**Key Verse:** *“Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!”*  
—James 3:5

**Selected Scripture:**  
James 3:1-12

**THE EFFECTS OF THE USE,** and misuse, of words is something we see each day. It has become especially so during this present day of constant information and social media communication. There has never been a time in which more exacting scrutiny has been applied to the words that people speak or write, whether they be those of government, religious leaders, economic strategists, social activists, or just the common people.

The tongue is one of the most influential parts of the human body, whether for good or for evil. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue,” the Scriptures say. (Prov. 18:21) Unfortunately, the stark reality is that because man has fallen far from his original perfection, the words of our lesson are clearly true, “The tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” (James 3:8) As the words of James indicate, and as personal experience has often shown us, it is more difficult to control the tongue than nearly any other part of our body. So skillful a servant is it that every ambition and passion and inclination of the fallen nature seeks to use it as a channel for evil.

If with our tongues, we do injury to others, we are to that extent falling far short, and perhaps even deceiving ourselves, with respect to our standing before God. It,

therefore, requires on the part of the Christian, much in the way of vigilance, wisdom and care to control this powerful member of the body, and to bring it into subjection. It is the spirit-begotten “mind of Christ” to which the tongue should be brought into conformity. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:” (I Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5) Thus, we are to continually seek to ensure that our tongue is not a hindrance, to ourselves nor to others, but a positive and useful servant in the narrow way.

The power to conquer the tongue and make it obedient and thoroughly reliable cannot be fully accomplished in our fallen fleshly condition. Nevertheless, we must continually fight this battle with every fiber of our being. Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” (Matt. 12:34) Since the tongue is the agent speaking “out of” the sentiments of the heart, it follows that it is the heart that needs to be converted if our words are habitually improper. Many Scriptures note the importance of continual examination of our heart condition. “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” “The end of the commandment is charity [love] out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”—Ps. 51:10; Prov. 4:23; I Tim. 1:5

If the same tongue can curse men, but also praise God, how careful we should be to speak only that which will be helpful and uplifting, and which will bring praise to our Heavenly Father. A greater use of our tongue in such positive ways will of necessity help to limit its use in unrighteous ways. This, too, begins with the heart and its motivating influence. If a properly motivated heart consistently guides our tongue toward honorable and edifying words, we will eventually gain the victory over this most difficult member of our flesh. Let it be our daily vow to follow these instructive words: “I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.”—Ps. 39:1 ■