

Control Your Speech

Key Verse: *“Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.”*
—James 3:10

Selected Scripture:
James 3:1-12

James cautions against having a hasty desire to become a teacher of God’s Word before carefully weighing the responsibility and privilege of such service. He considers a believer’s pattern of conversation, noting the tongue is the most difficult member of the body to control. However, and of even greater importance, Jesus said the tongue is merely an instrument, or index, of the heart condition. (Matt. 12:34) Only Christ, who was perfect, reflected truth, righteousness, and holiness in all his utterances. Nevertheless, as New Creatures, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, we must increasingly gain ascendancy over our fallen tendencies and speak helpful, wholesome words that will be edifying and beneficial to those who hear them.—James 3:1,2

In one illustration, James compares the responsibility of the new mind to control the power of the tongue to governing a horse’s motions by pulling the reins connected to a bit in the animal’s mouth. Though the bit is

TODAY’S LESSON FURNISHES practical applications relative to the power of speech, particularly by those who are recognized as teachers in the church. As such, these leaders must take special accountability for their words and actions.—Luke 12:48

a very small piece of steel, it can be used to control the horse's entire behavior. (vs. 3) Without this restraint, an unruly horse could easily run away with, or overthrow, its rider. Similarly, without exerting watchfulness over our words, the believer's spiritual growth can be seriously hampered.

Another simile for the tongue is a fire. When insinuations or evil speaking are carelessly dropped into the minds of others, the effect is like dropping a lighted match into combustible material. It can result in a conflagration that leaves behind a charred mass of devastating ruins. James says many beasts, winged creatures, reptiles, and sea creatures can be tamed or trained, given sufficient time and perseverance. However, man's success in subduing wild animals does not extend to the control of his tongue. Because words can inject untold evil into the lives of others, the apostle describes the tongue as an instrument "full of deadly poison."—vss. 5-8

Our Key Verse reminds us that, in addition to rendering praises to God, on occasion we also may be guilty of expressing words that are hurtful to others. To be more than overcomers, however, our new minds must dominate the tongue, since we will be judged by the degree to which we gain mastery over this instrument. It would be an act of hypocrisy to render praises to the Heavenly Father while in worship with the Lord's people, but outside of that setting to vilify the character of someone else with slanderous words. The contradictions James alludes to—a fountain yielding both fresh and salt water, or fig trees bringing forth olive berries or the reverse—simply do not exist in nature.—vss. 11,12

Our constant attitude should be such as reflected in this text: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer."—Ps. 19:14 ■