

Be Disciplined In Your Speech

Part #2 – The Tongue’s Power To Direct

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The focus of **James 3:1-12** is -- **Be Disciplined In Your Speech**

- **The Outline of Our Study On The Tongue**

As we dig into chapter 3 we see that the intention of *James is to STRESS the importance of controlling our tongues* and being disciplined in our speech. He does this by giving us **6 Pictures of the Tongue** which are divided into **3 Different Classifications** that reveal the three powers of the tongue. The message today deals with...

- ✓ **The Power to Direct vs. 3-4**

James 3:3-4 “Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. *4* 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, whithersoever the governor listeth.”

The tongue may be small but it is very powerful and influential. The uncontrolled tongue is “**set on fire of Hell.**” (**James 3:6**). **Proverbs 18:21a** says “Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue....” **Job 19:2** says, “How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words?”

In **James 3:3-4** he points out that the tongue has the power to direct and illustrates that by using the horses bridle and the ships rudder. When I say the tongue has the power to direct, I mean that the tongue has the power to affect others lives. The tongue can sway men to violence, or it can move them to the noblest actions. It can instruct the ignorant, encourage the dejected, comfort the sorrowing, and soothe the dying. Or, it can crush the human spirit, destroy reputations, spread distrust and hate, and bring nations to the brink of war.

During World War II there were posters that read ***LOOSE LIPS SINK SHIPS!*** But loose lips can offend others and even wreck others lives. That is why **it is so important to control your tongue!**

James begins by using the illustration specifically the **bit of a horses bridle.** It is a relatively small piece of hardware. A typical bit may not weigh more than one pound. Yet, from that small bit, a horseman can control and turn around the one-thousand pound body of the horse. The **bit is small but powerful** in its effect. If a horse is to be useful, then it must be under control.



One old preacher said this – *“The bridle bits are not impressive in size, but they can hold a high-spirited horse in check and keep him from running away. If you are old enough, you may have recollections of the horse-and-buggy days. I can recall seeing a horse run away, turn over a buggy, and bring death and destruction to a family. In the same way, the tongue can run away.”*

If a Christian is to be useful to God, he will need to keep his tongue under control. *Matthew Henry* says - *“The more quick and lively the tongue is, the more should we thus take care to govern it. Otherwise, as an unruly and ungovernable horse runs away with his rider, or throws him, so an unruly tongue will serve those in like manner who have no command over it.”*

I appreciate what Robert Barnes wrote - *“A man always has complete government over himself if he has the entire control of his tongue. It is that by which he gives expression to his thoughts and passions; and if that is kept under proper restraint, all the rest of his members are as easily controlled as the horse is by having the control of the bit.”*

David noted in ***Psalms 39:1*** *“I said, 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.”* In other words, David said that because he wanted to give the right kind of testimony, he would put a bridle on his mouth. My friend, there are a lot of Christians today who ought to have a bridle

put in their mouths. The tongue that is bridled is used of God and accomplished His purposes. The one that is not makes a mess of things.

The next illustration of control that James uses is the *helm* of a ship. **James 3:4** says, “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, whithersoever the governor listeth.”



The word *helm* is a translation of the Greek word πηδάλιον – pedalion (*pay-dal'-ee-on*) which literally means the blade of an oar. That is how first century ships were steered. This same word is translated “*rudder*” in **Acts 27:40** “And when they had taken up

the anchors, they committed *themselves* unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.”

The rudder, though it is small, must fight the winds and currents that would drive the ship off its course. The human tongue also must overcome contrary forces. We have an old nature that wants to control us and make us sin. There are circumstances around us that would make us say things we ought not to say. Sin on the inside and pressures on the outside are seeking to get control of the tongue.

Our tongue can really get us into trouble—there is no question about that. Someone has put it in words like this:

A careless word may kindle strife;
A cruel word may wreck a life.
A bitter word may hate instill;
A brutal word may smite and kill.

A gracious word may smooth the way;
A joyous word may light the day.
A timely word may lessen stress;
A loving word may heal and bless.

—Author unknown

Both the bit and the rudder must be under the control of a strong hand. The expert horseman keeps the mighty power of his horse under control, and the experienced pilot courageously steers the ship through the storm. When Jesus Christ controls the tongue, then we need not fear saying the wrong things — or even saying the right things in a wrong way! “Death and life are in the power of the tongue,” warned Solomon (**Proverbs 18:21**). No wonder David prayed, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Incline not my heart to any evil thing” (**Psalms 141:3-4**). David knew that *the heart* is the key to right speech. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (**Matthew 12:34**). When Jesus Christ is the Lord of the heart, then He is Lord of the lips too.

Never underestimate the guidance you give by the words you speak or do not speak. Jesus spoke to a woman at a well, and her life and the lives of her neighbors experienced a miraculous change (**John 4:1-54**). Peter preached at Pentecost and 3,000 souls came to salvation through faith in Christ (**Acts 2:1-47**).

On April 21, 1855, Edward Kimball went into a Boston shoe store and led young Dwight L. Moody to Christ. The result: one of history’s greatest evangelists. Thousands came to know Christ as their Savior. The tongue has the power to direct others to the right choices.

It would do us all good to read Book of Proverbs frequently, and to note especially the many references to speech. “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (**Proverbs 15:1**). “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord” (**Proverbs 12:22**). “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise” (**Proverbs 10:19**). Yes, the tongue is like a bit and a rudder: it has the power to direct. It is of the utmost importance that our tongues direct people in the right way!