

Tongue In Check

James 3:1-12

1. Our Class May Be Small, But Our Accountability Is Sobering (1-2; Mt 12:36-37)

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. ² For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

2. Our Tongue May Be Tiny, But Our Words Are Powerful (3-5a)

³ Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. ⁴ Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. ^{5a} Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.

3. Our Words Seem Insignificant, But The Impact Is Immense (5b-8)

^{5b} See how great a forest a little fire kindles! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. ⁸ But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. (cf. Ps 10:7; Prov 12:18)

- Insults (Prov 11:9)
- Gossip (Prov 11:13; 20:19; 26:20)
- Complaining (Cor 10:10; Phil 2:14; Isa 29:23-24)
- Swearing (Ex 20:7)

4. Our Mouth Is Useful, But Good Intentions Could Be Contaminated (9-12; Col 4:6)

⁹ With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

Conclusion:

- Set A Guard: Examine what you say (Ps 39:1; 141:3; James 1:26; Mt 15:11)
- Set A Goal: Encourage with your words (Eph 4:29)
- Seize The Gift: Enjoy wholesome and encouraging conversation and speech (Prov 15:23)

Discussion:

- Who in our life is most at risk to be injured by our words? What precautionary measures can we take to protect them from our tongue?
- How can James 1:19 become our routine N95 filter for our words (quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger)?
- How can we best remind ourselves of the enormous responsibility we have with our words as teachers, counselors, parents, spouses and friends?

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Introduction:

- During this time of Covid, there is a potential for division in churches. There are some who want to charge forward with reopening and challenge the state declaring civil liberties. There are others who are more reserved about reopening too quickly. This could easily be an issue where either side accuses the other side of being too **foolish** or too **faithless**.
- Our politicians on both sides of the aisle thrash each other with their words.
- Divorces are results of words
- World wars are a result of words
- Church splits are a result of words
- Broken friendships are a result of words
- Most of our personal pain, if not caused medically, is probably a result of words
- While it might be fun to speak **Tongue In Cheek** ...
- Today, we will be soberly challenged to speak **Tongue In Check**

1. Our Class May Be Small, But Our Accountability Is Sobering (1-2)

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. ²For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

- Ie/ PTL for our teachers. Our teachers are working harder to teach online and when schools open up, it will be a challenge for them. Classes may be spread out through the day and budgets are threatened. Our teachers are among our unappreciated heroes.
- Ie/ Vacation Bible School training is happening and I'm excited for those who will get opportunities to teach
 - I want to exhort you that this is a great thing, but also a sobering responsibility
 - We are commissioned to accurately teach God's Word and lovingly communicate the Gospel
 - The commission doesn't come from your pastors or lead teachers, but from Christ Himself
- The Great Commission in Matthew 28 calls each of us to make disciples and teach them God's Word
 - Every teacher is held accountable about what we teach
 - False religious teachers will be accountable teaching:
 - about idols and not God
 - other sources of hope other than the Gospel of Christ
 - teaching that Jesus is a mere mortal rather than our Lord, King and Savior
 - Every pastor, priest, imam, monk, nun, pope and seminary professor will give account to God for what we teach about Him and His Word.

²For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

- It's very easy and common to stumble in life and in speech
- James 2 just challenged us on having works that match our faith, a life that walks what we talk
- But James also knows it's easy for all of us as sinners to stumble in word and in deed
- Ie/ I sprained my ankle because I'm prone to clumsiness
- Ie/ I'm also prone to falling spiritually and sinning in word and deed
- But as a teacher, I'm responsible for what I say and do before God because of the impact of influence
- **The key is maturity** – "perfect man" (*telios* = mature), maturity brings self control
 - When we're immature, we speak our mind without filters or thinking about the impact of what we say
 - The more we grow in Christ, the more we measure our words before we utter them
 - The key to mature speech: Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger

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

- It's not just preachers, Sunday School teachers and Day Camp teachers
 - **Parents** are teachers – God will hold us accountable to what we teach our kids – value God, love and serve at church, live righteously, set example (do and say)
 - **Managers** are instructors
 - **Church Leaders** are instructors

- **Disciplers** are teachers
- **Politicians, News Reporters, Media Entertainment** – accountable to the moral message they legislate, write about, sing about or film about

Matthew 12:36-37 ⁶But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

2. Our Tongue May Be Tiny, But Our Words Are Powerful (3-5a)

³Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. ⁴Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. ^{5a}Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.

- We misjudge the power of our tongue
- The tongue is used illustratively of our speaking ability, as the heart is the organ that illustrates our emotions and the brain is the organ that illustrates our thinking.
- If we're not good listeners, thinking about our words and controlling our anger – our words can cause a lot of **damage**.
- The tongue is tiny but carries a big punch.

³**Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.**

- I love watching horses – they are all muscle and full of power
- But they are controlled by their rider with a bit in their mouth – a tiny piece of equipment on the horses harness
- The tongue is like a bit – a small tool with big power
- Ie/ perhaps in the modern illustration, Paul may have used a computer chip – tiny with lots of power

⁴**Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.**

- This small piece of equipment steers a ship or an airplane
- The tongue seems little but carries a big punch

^{5a}**Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.**

3. Our Words Seem Insignificant, But The Impact Is Immense (5b-8)

^{5b}See how great a forest a little fire kindles! ⁶And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. ⁷For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. ⁸But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

^{5b} See how great a forest a little fire kindles! ^{6a} And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.

- Ie/ it only takes an unextinguished cigarette to start a devastating forest fire
- Ie/ faulty electric equipment started the horrific fires in Santa Rosa
- Ie/ forgetting to turn off your stove can lead to burning your house down
- So a little word can have devastating effects

6b The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

- Our words can impact our **body**, our **family**, our **community**, our **church**, our **country**
- Scottish Proverb: "Keep your tongue a prisoner and your body will go free."
- The flames were lit from the matches from hell – a poetic way of saying it didn't come from God

Words Hurt!!!

Psalm 10:7 His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression; Under his tongue is trouble and iniquity.

- Sticks and stones may break bones
- But words hurt more
- "Verbal abuse is defined as the use of words or tone of voice to control or hurt another person or to destroy self-worth. Verbal abuse can be as devastating as physical abuse within a marriage – a destroyer of respect, trust and intimacy. Verbally abusive language is meant to:
 - Intimidate with threats
 - Shame with accusations
 - Belittle with name-calling
 - Confuse with mind games
 - Badger with excessive questioning
 - Deceive with lies
 - Insults with profanity(Hunt, June – "Wife Abuse: Assault On A Woman's Worth", Biblical Counseling Keys, Hope For The Heart, 2001, p. 2)
- "*Emotional or psychological abuse*: Mistreating and controlling someone through fear, manipulation, intimidation, and attacking that person's sense of self-worth. The abuser seeks to make his wife [or victim] feel afraid, helpless, confused, and worthless. This form of abuse includes: name-calling, mocking, belittling, accusing, blaming, yelling, swearing, harassing, isolating you from family and friends, abusing authority, withholding emotional support and affection, and betraying your trust." (Barner, Leslie J. – A Way Of Hope: Seven Steps Toward Breaking The Cycle Of Violence In Your Life, Family Life, pdf booklet available at http://www.familylife.com/articles/article_detail.asp?id=407)

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

7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.

- Even the Tiger King could pet a tiger sometimes
- A tranquillizer immobilizes a bear when transporting it to a zoo
- A piranha fish at the aquarium is better for me than swimming in the Amazon

8 But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

- But compared to a wild animal, the tongue is unruly

- **Insults**

Proverbs 11:9 The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.

- Even coarse jesting, ragging on other, "cut downs" are painful
 - Ie/ In 9th grade, another classmate and I won the "Most Wittiest" yearbook accolade by exchanging insulting jokes to gather a crowd. It was all in jest and we would congratulate each other after our jabs got "ooohs" and "aaaahs" from our yearbook class. At our 10 year H.S. reunion, we found out we both became Christians and were quite embarrassed by how we became popular in Jr. High through the exchange of humor in poor taste and we can redeem our sharp tongue with the hope of the Gospel.
 - Ie/ I had to be rebuked by my pastor for carrying on with insulting humor in my college years.
- **Gossip** (Prov 11:13; 20:19; 26:20)

Proverbs 11:13 A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.

- **Gossip's 4 Violations:**

- Violate person spoken of
 - Violate impressions of listener
 - Violate your own reputation with your gossiping tongue
 - Violate the teaching of Scripture
- Ie/ Wall Street Journal: Full page ad (quoted in Dear Abby)
"My name is Gossip. I have no respect for justice.
I maim without killing. I break hearts and ruin lives.
The more I am quoted the more I am believed.
My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me because I have no name and no face.
To track me down is impossible. The harder you try, the more elusive I become.

I am nobody's friend.
 Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same.
 I topple governments and wreck marriages.
 I ruin careers and cause sleepless nights, heartaches and indigestion.
 I make innocent people cry in their pillows.
 Even my name hisses. I am called Gossip. I make headlines and headaches.
 Before you repeat a story, ask yourself:
 Is it true? Is it harmless? Is it necessary?
 If it isn't, don't repeat it."

- Ie/ **Charles Spurgeon**: "Tale-bearing emits a threefold poison; for it injures the teller, the hearer, and the person concerning whom the tale is told."
- **Complaining** (Cor 10:10; Phil 2:14; Isa 29:23-24)
 - Nagging

1 Corinthians 10:10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

Philippians 2:14 Do all things without complaining and disputing,

- **Swearing**

Exodus 20:7 You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

4. **Our Mouth Is Useful, But Good Intentions Could Be Contaminated (9-12)**

⁹ *With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.* ¹⁰ *Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.* ¹¹ *Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?* ¹² *Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.*

v. 9 *With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.*

¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

- The same tool used to bless God through prayer is the same tool that:
 - insults our spouse
 - demeans our co-workers
 - gossips about friends
 - criticizes without solutions
- We do a lot of good things with our mouth
 - Teachers teach
 - Preachers preach

- Lawyers defend
 - Managers lead
 - Counselors encourage
 - Singers sing
 - Customer service solves
- But our good words can be contaminated by the same container being contaminated
 - Ie/ Covid19 – disinfect surfaces when leave the office
 - Ie/ serving food in clean containers
 - Contamination happens with tiny little germs
 - Ie/ Getting sick from our cute little kids
 - Our mouths can do good things but also cause a lot of damage

¹¹ Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

- **Ie/ Castle in S.F.** – Did you know there is a 140 year castle in San Francisco?
 - <https://www.thealbioncastle.com/city-culture>
 - It's a hidden treasure in the Hunter's Point area (a place you wouldn't expect a castle)
 - It is preserved because in case of a disaster, it contains S.F.'s only fresh water spring source.
 - Contaminating a source of pure water is of great concern.
 - So is guarding the source of the words that spring forth from our mouth?
- Guard your tongue from contamination
- ie/ How much will your spouse believe you love him/her when half of what you say to them is demeaning or insulting?
- ie/ How can we inspire our kids to individual success when we compare them to someone else?
- ie/ How can we tell our kids to love God when we are also teaching them to love the world?
- **Our good intentions can be easily contaminated.**

Colossians 4:6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Conclusion:

1. **Set A Guard: Examine what you say** (Ps 39:1; 141:3; James 1:26; Mt 15:11)

Psalm 141:3 Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.

Psalm 39:1 I said, "I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me."

James 1:26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

Matthew 15:11 Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.

- *O be careful little mouth what you say...for the Father up above is looking down in love*

2. Set A Goal: Encourage with your words (Eph 4:29)

Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers

- Today, find someone to encourage as church ends
- Make it a goal to encourage someone at work, school or family this week

3. Seize The Gift: Enjoy wholesome and encouraging conversation and speech (Prov 15:23)

Proverbs 15:23 A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!

Discussion:

1. Who in our life is most at risk to be injured by our words? What precautionary measures can we take to protect them from our tongue?
2. How can James 1:19 become our routine N95 filter for our words (quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger)?
3. How can we best remind ourselves of the enormous responsibility we have with our words as teachers, counselors, parents, spouses and friends?