

Persuaded enough to take action

• *Inconsistency is grotesque and perverse*

• *James is not talking about how*

• *We have all that is necessary for us to control the tongue*

• *We just need motivating to do it!*

Five reasons for taking the necessary action to control our tongues

(1) *The Christian is expected to be consistent*

(2) *Men and women are made in the image of God*

James began this section with a warning to those who wished to be teachers in the church^{□1}. That led him to speak of the tendency we have to use our tongues badly^{□2}, yet there is rich blessing for us if we can control the tongue^{□3}. Verses 3–8 give a series of illustrations all of which underline the immense power of the tongue, for good and for evil. Now verses 9–12 urge us to see our inconsistency in this matter as grotesque and perverse.

It is notable in all of this that James never says how we should deal with this problem! There is surely a reason for the omission. James is writing to Christian people. We can deal with this problem. The world can at best only restrain itself, but we can go further. We do have the power and the strength to become gracious people. The exceeding greatness of God's resurrection-power is already within us. We have all that is necessary for us to control the tongue. We are in the kingdom of grace. We have the power of the Holy Spirit. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. All that has to happen is that we have to be convinced enough that this is important, so as to take action, no matter what it will cost us. James' words are concerned not with arguing a theology of sanctification, but with persuading us that the tongue is powerfully influential^{□1} and that inconsistency in this matter is a serious sin^{□2}.

He says, *'With the tongue we bless the Lord and Father; and with the tongue we curse people, who are made in the likeness of God^{□1}. Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things ought not to happen in this way^{□2}.*

The main point in all of this is: (1) **the Christian is expected to be consistent**. It is weird and peculiar for a man or woman at one moment to be praising God, calling upon God, seeking a close relationship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, but then not long after speaking abusively to some fellow human being! This is extraordinary inconsistency. James is concerned that we should work out our salvation. What we truly are should show itself in how we talk. If we are a Christian we are someone who is able to be in touch with God. But it is very extraordinary then to be insulting others! James' teaching is: be what you are! You are a worshipper. Your tongue is given over to God. But then let it be given over to God in human relationships as well as in piety!

Then James has a few other arguments to put to us. (2) **Men and women are made in the image of God**. It is one thing to speak badly of a dog or a cat, an insect or a worm. But men and women are not animals; unlike the animals they are made in God's image. They are the high-point of God's creation. To insult a fellow human-being is a serious business because God wants great honour and dignity to be placed upon human life. If you insult a person, you are insulting the object of greatest concern to God, the only living being in this world who is made in His image.

□1 3:1
□2 3:2a
□3 3:2b

□1 3:3-8
□2 3:9-12

□1 3:9
□2 3:10

(3) James asks us to consider our duty

Then (3) **James asks us to consider our duty.** ‘These things ought not to happen’. James is not getting complicated or highly philosophical. It is quite simple. ‘These things ought not to happen’. The Christian has a plain and straightforward duty to use his tongue skilfully and not to use it badly. You are not under the Mosaic law. You are not condemned by God. But you do have a duty to be grateful for your salvation. If nothing else can convince us, James say to us, ‘Do your duty. Do what you know you ought to do.’

(4) Our talk reveals the state of our heart

But there is another reason why we should listen to James. (4) **Our talk reveals the state of our heart.** ‘Does a water- spring bubble up from the same source both fresh water and bitter water?’¹ Brothers and sisters, can a fig tree yield olives, or can a vine yield figs? No. Nor can salt water produce sweet water². What comes up from a water-spring is what is truly down there in the earth. What grows upon a tree shows what is the nature of the tree. And what comes out of our mouth shows what is hidden in the inmost places within our lives. Grace is able to control the tongue. Malice and animosity comes out at the mouth. What comes out is what is within. Our words reveal the remaining uncontrolled sin in our nature. We may think we are pure within, but if our talk is polluted our heart is polluted. And, strange as it may seem, the way to cleanse our hearts is to cleanse our talk.

1 3:11
2 3:12

(5) Cleansing our tongue is the fastest way to grow spiritually

(5) **Cleansing our tongue is the fastest way to grow spiritually.** If we walk in the light we shall praise our God and Father, but His light will show us many things about ourselves which we do not like to see. But we must still walk in the light, acting upon what God shows us. If we take action in this matter of our talk, the blood of Christ will go on cleansing us from all sin. We shall grow spiritually in leaps and bounds. If we take these things seriously we shall be amazed at what blessing we shall discover. We shall feel clean. Our praises will be more lively than ever.



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