

- A. When preparing to write this sermon, I struggled with having hope that this message could help people change.
- B. Earlier I preached on James 3:1-2. Look again at v2 and how James spoke of perfection. This needs to be clarified by looking at James 1:4 for some context in how James is using “perfect” as tested or proven rather than sinless.

I. THE POWER OF A SMALL MEMBER → v2

- A. This verse suggests that one’s ability to exercise control over the tongue will lead to an overall improvement in self-control over the rest of the body as well.
 - 1. Learning to control this small, powerful member will allow you to improve your overall self-control.
 - 2. Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5). It makes logical sense that growth in this fruit of grace has carry-over into multiple areas of your life.
- B. As a student of nature and man’s ingenuity, James used some illustrations to teach on the power of the tongue. → vv3-5

- 1. The horse bit is a relatively small piece of metal placed in a horse’s mouth, yet because of its strategic location, it can control a horse weighing hundreds of pounds.
- 2. A boat weighing thousands of pounds can be controlled and directed by a very small rudder. The boat pilot can use that rudder to maneuver a great ship even when it is driven by strong winds.
- 3. Both the horse’s bit and the boat’s rudder are small yet have great power of control. The same is true of the tongue in matters of this life. It has power to be used for either good or evil.
 - a. Dr. Curtis Vaughan wrote of the tongue in this passage, “It 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.”¹
 - b. Prov 18:21a says, “**Death and life are in the power of the tongue.**”
 - 1) In your family— especially in marriage— the way you speak to one another can either make or break your relationship.
 - 2) The use of the tongue can either make or break a church or business.

C. James used fire as another great force of nature to describe the power of the tongue. → v5

- 1. A fire can keep you warm during a cold winter, yet a small fire can destroy millions of acres.
- 2. Just as you would be very cautious not to start a fire during a burn ban, you should exercise such caution with your tongue.

D. James taught that the tongue can be influenced by the evil one. → v6

- 1. Describing first the dangers of hell, Matthew Henry wrote of the necessity of having the work of the Holy Spirit to influence our tongues, “Hell has more to do in promoting the fire of the tongue than men are generally aware of... The devil is expressly called a liar, a murderer, an accuser of the brethren; and, whenever men’s tongues are employed in any of these ways, they are set on fire of hell... where the tongue is thus guided and wrought upon by a fire from heaven, there it kindleth good thoughts, holy affections, and ardent devotions.”
- 2. Consider your heart when you consider your tongue. When Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, He said there is an important relationship between one’s heart and one’s words. → Mat 12:33-37

¹ Vaughan, Curtis. *James: A Study Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), p. 69

II. WRESTLE TO TAME THE TONGUE →vv7-8

A. Let Scripture interpret Scripture to help you to understand what James meant when he said, “**no one can tame the tongue.**” It helps to look at what James wrote earlier about bridling the tongue.

1. **Ja 1:26 “If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless.”**

a. You are not a Christian if you don’t bridle or restrain your tongue to some degree.

b. Restraint of your tongue is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

c. Is it possible to have a tongue that is bridled yet not fully tamed? Yes, imagine the tongue as a wild horse.

2. Matthew Henry said that the tongue “cannot be tamed by the power and art which serves to tame these things. No man can tame the tongue without supernatural grace and assistance. The apostle does not intend to represent it as a thing impossible, but as a thing extremely difficult, which therefore will require great watchfulness, and pains, and prayer, to keep it in due order.”²

B. James pointed out that even among the Christian community of his day, there was a very inconsistent use of the tongue. →vv9-12

1. Imprecatory Psalms and prayers can still be used with the hope of bringing an enemy of God down to their knees so they would cry out to God for salvation through Jesus Christ.

2. What about those people on the highway that cut you off in traffic?

C. Not Moses, Paul, nor even James were ever perfect with the use of their tongue. Only of Jesus could it be said, “**He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth**” (**Isa 53:9**).

1. All of tonight’s text should show you that you are not perfect. You are more sinful than thought. You and I sin daily in thought, word, and deed.

2. The gospel tells us that Jesus died for sinners such as you and me.

a. By trusting in Christ as your Lord and Savior you will be forgiven the sins of your tongue, mind, and body.

b. His perfect record will also be accounted as your own.

c. The calling of your life is that you earnestly seek the means of grace to put sin to death.

1 Cor 6:19-20 “...you are not your own. For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” That includes your tongue— that unruly yet powerful part of your body.

Review, further application, and conclusion

² Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary, vol VI: Acts to Revelation*, p. 985