
Be Careful What You Say (Pt.3)

James 3:9-12

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Transcript

Amen. Well, once again, I want to invite you to take your Bible and turn to James chapter three. This is our last look at this section on the tongue. We've taken a slight deviation from our study of Mark to look at James chapter three. We tied it in to the story that we covered in chapter four of mark, with Jesus calming the sea and seeing the disciples reaction to that.

Scripture tells us that they were amazed and that they were afraid. I think two emotions that you and I would have experienced as well. And so the question that I raised when I took us to James three is, what kind of response do you have? What would your mouth have said, having witnessed Jesus say to the storm to hush and to be still? What would you have done?

What would have been your response? And I could just bring it into the present? What is your response today to things that happen in your life? How do you express that? Now, in our last two times together, we saw that the tongue has power to direct, and it also has power to destroy.

In its power to direct, James gave the illustration of the teacher, the bit and the bridle. In its power to destroy. He gave the illustration of fire as well as wild animals. And through all of his illustrations, he has shown us that a small object has the potential to direct as well as destroy. And we've also learned that if you can control this little member, then you can control your life.

David said that to us, that he would put a muzzle over his lips, that it would guard his ways. This little member has so much power. Now, today we're going to look at verses nine through twelve, and we're going to see two more things that the tongue can do. It has the power to delight as well as the power to defame.

And now James is showing us the inconsistency of the tongue. This is what one commentator refers to as to perfidy, to compromise, you say, well, what is perfidy? Well, perfidy refers to a deliberate breach of trust or treachery. And an unbridled tongue is frequently guilty of such evil. The tongue is not just wild and raging like an animal, but clever and plodding and subtly deceptive.

It's hypocritical and duplicitous and eagerly willing to deceive in order to achieve its own advantage. So you can't trust this little member. It will certainly let you down.

And maybe that is why in another passage of scripture, it talks about putting your hand over your mouth to control what you say. So here James is recognizing that the tongue, it can be used in the noble activity of praising God. But it's also readily used to curse men. Look at verse nine. It says, with it we bless our Lord and father, and with it we curse men who have been made in the likeness of God.

From the same mouth come both blessing and cursing, my brethren. These things ought not to be this way. Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.

And there you see the inconsistency of the tongue. But here we're seeing that it first has the power to delight. And we see that in verse nine, as it blesses God, it says, with it, we bless our God and father. We've all seen this. We probably have experienced this as well, especially when your kids were little and they were always into something and you're trying to do so.

Maybe you're trying to have a devotional, maybe you're trying to read your Bible, and they keep interrupting you, and they keep doing things and they keep getting into things. And after a while, your delight in God turns into a defamation of the tongue, because now you are spreading slander and blasphemy and all these other things that we tend to do with our mouths because your children have interfered with that sacred moment. Or maybe it's another situation. I remember when I would hurt myself. I would have filthy words come out of my mouth.

That was something, part of the Lord cleaning my mouth up, that he also cleaned up. But this is something that unfortunately, we bless God and then we curse men. Now, let's talk about this blessing. This was huge for the Jewish people. It was a prominent part of their devotion.

They would actually say very frequently, the HOLY one, blessed be he. That was a most frequent description of God in rabbinic literature. The Jews to whom James wrote, they were accustomed to pronouncing blessings on God. At the end of each of the 18 eulogies or benedictions, they prayed three times a day. They would say, blessed be thou, o God.

They do that three times a day. So in the Jewish community, every time the name of God was mentioned, the phrase blessed be he was added. You say, well, what does the word bless mean? Because again, we tend to even use that word a lot. And we say, well, that was a blessing.

Or we say, we need to bless that person, or we want to bless God. Well, the word there is where we get the word eulogy. Now, we all know what a eulogy is, that those are the kind words that the minister says over the person that has just died, and you're at a funeral, and they're laid out in front of you in a casket, and the minister gives a eulogy. He speaks well of the person. That's what the word means, to speak well, to extol.

And so in this case, he's saying that we speak well of God. We extol him, we praise him, we celebrate his name, we celebrate his acts with praise. And there are many examples of this in scripture. After collecting the generous gifts and offerings from the people for building the temple, we read in one Chronicles 29:10, it says, David blessed the Lord before all the assembly and said, blessed are you, Lord God of Israel, our father, forever and ever. So all the gifts were brought for the building of the temple, and David offers up praise to God at the end of the prayer.

We're told in verse 20 that he said to all the assembly, now, bless the Lord your God. So all the assembly blessed the Lord God of their fathers and bowed their heads and prostrated themselves before the Lord and the king. This is the right thing to do. We are to bless God. This is what we want to do all the time, right?

This is what we want our tongue to be used for. We hear of other places where God's people blessed our God and father. Psalm 34, verse one says, I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. Psalm 63 says, o God, you are my God.

Early will I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for you in the sanctuary to see your power and your glory, because your loving kindness is better than life. My lips shall praise you thus.

I will bless you while I live. I will lift up my hands in your name. So not only are they saying blessing and speaking well of God, but they're lifting their hands up in one place. In another place. They're bowing down.

They're prostrating themselves. They're speaking well of God. They're speaking about his loving kindness. They're speaking about his acts, his works. Psalm 66 eight.

O bless our God, you peoples, and make the voice of his praise be heard. You know, that's what should be coming from us. Every time we're together and we're worshiping God, we should be blessing God, speaking well of God. God is good to us. Now, you and I, we all have trials in our life.

All of us have them. But don't blame God for them. Don't let those trials that are test of your faith turn into temptation to where you begin to either directly or indirectly blame God for the situation you're in, and blame God ultimately for the trial that you're experiencing. First Corinthians 10:13 talks about trials are common to man, but it also

talks about God being faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you're able to bear. And I know sometimes you feel like, I can't bear this any longer.

And, you know, what about that time when you feel that the trial's over? We need to just make sure that we're blessing him, not blaming him for what we are experiencing. We go through what we're going through because of the fall, because of indwelling sin, because of this flesh, because of sin in our world. That's why we experience what we experience. We need to have what this psalmist said in psalm 145, verse one.

I will extol you, my God, my kingdom. I will bless your name forever and ever. Every day. I will bless you, and I will praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

So that should be what always comes from our lips. We shouldn't have bad words coming out of our mouth. We should always bless our God and father, and we should do this all day long. And what are you blessing for? Well, psalm 35, verse 28 says, my tongue shall speak of your righteousness and of your praise.

So speak of his goodness, speak of his character. We sang just a moment ago, holy, holy, holy. And you say, well, why does it say, holy, holy, holy three times? And someone says, well, that's the way the song goes. Now.

They said it three times for emphasis. Some say, well, it stands for the trinity. Well, the Trinity is thrice holy. But for a Hebrew, when they would emphasize something, they would repeat it two or three times. You and I, when we want emphasis, what do we do?

We take our pen and we underline it. Right. We put a lot of underlines under the phrase or under the word. If you could see my notes, you can see things underlined specifically. Or I have circles drawn around them for reasons.

I have them highlighted for reasons. These are things that are telling me things that I want to talk about. But for a Jew, they would say, holy, holy, holy. And we see that also in Isaiah, chapter six, when the seraphim there are before the throne of God. And what are they saying?

Holy, holy, holy is the lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. And they just kept saying that back and forth in antiphonal praise. Well, again, it's all for emphasis. When Jesus would say, truly, truly, it's the same point.

He was doing it for emphasis. In the Greek, it would be amen. Amen, which sounds like amen. Amen. Jesus never needed someone to say amen after he said something.

He said amen before he said it. He didn't need anybody to agree with him. What he had to say was truth. So we are blessing God for his righteousness and for his praise. Notice there the phrase our God and father.

That's really combined under one article in Greek, and it's showing us that these two titles point to God's authority and his sovereign power and his love and compassion. When it refers to him as father, that is introducing the idea of the divine likeness of man, and it stresses his love in sharp contrast with the mutual or the mutual hatred of men cursing each other. So we see what the tongue is doing here. It is delighting, right? It's blessing.

Well, here becomes the problem. He also says in verse nine, and with it we curse men who have been made in the likeness of God. This places this evil use of the tongue alongside its prior noble use. And with it that denotes here again, the tongue is but an instrument, and it's giving expression to the feeling in the speaker's heart. You remember that we read, Jesus said, out of the heart, the mouth speaks.

And what are the things that come out of the heart? All kinds of evil. Sometimes if you say something, you go, wow, where'd that come from? Well, it came from your heart. Do you see why we shouldn't be trusting our heart?

Jeremiah said that the heart is desperately wicked. Who can know it? And if it's desperately wicked, then we certainly don't want to trust it. As we said earlier, it's treacherous. It will let you down.

It will deceive you. Now, let's talk about this curse right here. He says there in verse nine with it, we curse men. Now, immediately, you're probably thinking of those four letter curse words. Well, that's not really what he means here, though.

I would say ephesians 4:29 would pick that up. We are not to have that proceeding out of our mouth. But the curse here, it's not a reference to the use of profanity. The curse is the idea of wishing evil on a person. It's really worse than a curse word, because here's what it means.

It's referring to a personal abuse which results from losing your temper in a heated controversy. It's not just to swear at them. It's the desire here it is that they be cut off from God and experience eternal punishment. Now, let me just say that a way you would understand it. This would be the same as telling someone to go to hell.

That's the same thing.

And what makes this so heinous is that the one whom we pronounced damned has been made in God's image. Even the rabbis cautioned against cursing for the same reason. They said one should not say, let my neighbor be put to shame, for then you put to shame one who is in the image of God.

Unbelievers, believers alike, are made in the image of God. We devalue the way we look at people when we think that way, and especially when we talk like that. If it's an unbeliever, they need Christ, right? But if you're over there telling them to go to hell because you're mad at them, do you think that they're going to be looking to Christ because the way that you were using that was not out of compassion, warning them about the place? No.

You're wishing that they would go to hell. See how dangerous this is? There's another passage I want you to see. Turn over to Romans chapter twelve. Romans, chapter twelve.

And in Romans chapter twelve and verse nine, we also hear where these words are used.

First he tells us to let love be without hypocrisy. And then he says, abhor what is evil and cling to what is good. And from that point, he's really giving a commentary on how to do that. By devoting yourself to one another in brotherly love, by giving preference to one another in honor, not lagging behind in diligence, being fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, being devoted in prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. And then he says this.

Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Now, the word bless is the same word that's used in James, so read it back that way. Speak well of those who persecute you. Speak well of them and do not wish divine judgment on them.

Well, that changed the idea of that verse, at least the way we thought it meant.

Speak well of them. Now, that is one of the hardest things to do if you're being persecuted, right? Because that person is demonstrating hate to you, that person wants you dead, that person doesn't want you alive, doesn't want you experiencing the blessing of God or anything like that they just want you gone, and they hope that when you're gone, you're in hell.

So how do you speak well of that? Well, you might not necessarily speak well of that, the words that they're using, but you can speak well of the fact that God is the one that's in control. And for one reason or another, he has allowed this in your life. And

before you dismiss it, maybe you need to look to see why he's allowed that. Maybe it's just to teach you perseverance.

But we're even told in Matthew 543, he says, you have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies. Bless those who curse you, do not or do good to those who hate you. Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. So he's really giving us now an understanding of how we are to bless those who curse us, how we are to speak well of them.

And he begins with loving your neighbor. Now, what's it mean to love your neighbor? Speak well of them, meet their need if you can. Maybe. Now, when we're talking about neighbor, we're not just talking about the person living next door to you.

We're talking about anybody in your life. Maybe it's the repairman that came to repair something in your house. And, you know, now they don't carry parts with them. So they, you know, you waste your first visit by them coming in and them diagnosing the problem, and then they have to order the parts and it's going to wait a week. And we had all that going on with our washing machine at one time, and it took us seemed like two months to finally get that thing fixed.

And where the warranty company had told us that, you know, so many calls to repair that they would replace it, well, they reneged on that and they said they're going to fix it. I said, well, you know, I don't really care if you're going to replace it or fix it. We just need our washing machine. You know, I guess we could have hooked up the old timey one we found on the property that had the rollers and you had to roll everything through it. We actually have one of those not meant to be used, just meant to be adored, meant to be looked at.

But here he's saying, you gotta love your neighbors, not hate them. You need to speak well of them, not call down divine curses on them. You need to do good to them and you need to pray for them. And I can hear it. Now what your prayer may be, God get them.

But if you're speaking well of them and you're to love them, then your prayer should be in that line. Right again. I know this is hard to do. I go through it as well.

But the truth is, both believers as well as unbelievers are guilty of cursing men who have been made in the image of God. We don't think about that part, do we, that each person in here, every person we have ever encountered or will encounter has been made in the image of God. They bear his image. That's what makes murder so heinous.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 says it this way, for there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin. Also, do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you for many times. Also, your heart has known that even you have cursed others.

That, again, is hard, too, isn't it? Especially when you hear somebody talking about you and you hear them talking about you, and it's not good. What's the best thing to do there? Leave. Because your first inclination is to go right over there to that situation.

Right. You say, they're talking about me. I'm gonna go hear what they're saying about me, and then I'm gonna give them something to talk about. That's where we usually lose our testimony for sure. I think, if anything, that should help us.

Think about the fact that you and I have a testimony of Christ, and we want unbelievers to come to Christ. We want believers also to walk in Christ. So whether it's my brother or sister doing this to me in Christ, or whether it's an unbeliever doing this, that I don't know, or I do know, sometimes I've gotten more respect out of unbelievers than I've gotten out of believers. Even though they still do what they do. I find them being a little bit more conscious about their sins when they're around me, just because when they know that I'm a pastor, they.

I don't know what they're thinking. But I always hear this. Pardon my French, Rev. I always hear that when they're cussing around me, it's like, well, you know, that's not french, and I can understand it. So it'd be best if you could find something else to say that burns my blood if it's going on in front of my family.

So, really, all I can do in that situation is get them out of there as best I can. But it hurts even more when it's other family members doing it. You know, look at what he says here. Men who have been made in the image of God. That's, again, both unbelievers and believers and the idea that they have been made.

It indicates that the divine likeness that was imparted at creation has not been totally obliterated.

The reference is to man as he is now. Sin has marred his likeness of goddess. And yet, as God's noblest creature, every human being retains an indestructible nobility that declares his divine origin and his dignity as the crown of creation. You say, well, what do you mean by that? Well, fallen man is indeed a scandal, but God has appointed man as a representative over his creation.

He is actually the glory of the universe. And so when we're talking about the likeness of God, it consists chiefly in the fact that man is a personal and rational and moral being. And beyond all God's creatures, he possesses the attributes of reason and intellect and will and conscience. He has the ability to know and serve God. He has the capacity to be conformed to God's and moral and spiritual likeness.

And so to curse man is to curse God's image, just as murder is a strikeout against his image. So no matter how you might define depravity, it's evident that though in the fall, the image of God was greatly impaired, but it was not annihilated. We are wicked people. We are evil people. But praise God that that is not expressed to be seen as how we really are.

Now, for a believer, God has granted him a new nature, and what he still has is this flesh. Paul talks about the flesh in Romans chapter seven, as that which brings him down. The things he wants to do, he doesn't do. The things he doesn't want to do, he ends up doing. So he says, with the law, I'm going to serve it with my mind, but sin gets served with my flesh.

And so how are we to deal with this flesh? Well, Colossians three five says that we are to put it to death. We are to kill the sinful deeds of our body. So that means that we don't give in to this little tongue when it's out there espousing and promoting all the kinds of wickedness and evil that it can do.

And I really do believe that the mouth of a Christian is much different than a non-Christian, and it should be. We should have different words that we use. We should have a totally different reaction to how we respond to things. But notice something that occurs right here as well. We see that it can bless and it can and it can.

Sorry. It can curse for some reason that want to come out. It can bless and curse at the same time. It can do it simultaneously. Look at what he says out of the same mouth.

Proceed. Blessing and cursing. This shows us the fatal inconsistency of the tongue.

Now, the emphasis in that phrase right there is the word same. You have both blessing and curses flowing readily from the same mouth. That shows its moral perversity as its source. So no man can acceptably praise and bless God while feeling bitter hatred toward his fellow man, who bears God's image. First, John 4:20 says, if someone says, I love God and hates his brother, he's a liar.

For he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has nothing seen?

It's very inconsistent, it's very hypocritical. Yet we've all been guilty of that hypocrisy to some extent.

Think about the scribes and the Pharisees. They claimed to bless God, but they demanded the crucifixion of Jesus, accusing him of blasphemy. Or take Peter. We mentioned Peter last week, Matthew 16:16. He says of Jesus, you are the Christ, the son of the living God.

And then a few weeks later, Matthew 26:74 says, he begins to curse and swear and saying that he did not know Jesus.

So on one occasion, even the apostle Paul allowed his tongue to slip. You say, well, how did he do that? Well, Acts 23:3, he called the high priest a whitewashed wall. A whitewashed wall was something that looked good on the outside, but it was corruptible on the inside. That's what he called the high priest.

You were not to speak against the high priest. In fact, when he found out that it was the high priest, he even quoted Old Testament scripture saying, he wasn't supposed to do that. And then he claimed he didn't even know he was the high priest. But the truth is he should have never said it to begin with, regardless of whether this was the high priest or not. So James rebukes this kind of inconsistency.

First, he does it directly. Notice there in verse ten, he says, my brethren, these things ought not to be so. So he begins with this gentle, affectionate use of the term brethren. And he is grieved that there is such inconsistency going on. But he says that this ought not to be so.

This is a very strong negative in the New Testament. It indicates something that is completely out of character, something that shouldn't have happened or shouldn't continue to happen. One writer says to bless God and at the same time cursed members of God's family is abnormal. It's out of harmony with the wholesome family relationships. The sum total of the law is to love unequivocally.

Say that fast, both God and neighbor, not to bless the one and curse the other. There should be no place in our life for this kind of speech. Now notice verse eleven, the illustration that he gives, and it comes from nature and from agriculture. He says, does a spring send forth both fresh water and bitterread from the same opening? What's the answer?

No. Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives? What's the answer? No. Or a grapevine bear figs?

What's the answer? No. Thus, no spring yields both saltwater and fresh. So he gives this first illustration from nature.

Does a spring send forth fresh water? And bitter from the same opening? Bitter, nauseating water. Distasteful. Brackish.

Our creeks down here have brackish water. If you were living in Palestine, you would be very familiar with the imagery that he's using. They were familiar with the springs and the wells that would produce good water, but there was also others that would produce bad water. But the water that was poured would pour forth from a given source, would not change from one kind to another. It remained constant.

If it was bad, it was bad when it came out, it was bad when it hit the ground, it was bad when it hit your mouth. What's the kind of water we deal with today? For us, sulfur water. Don't you love it? Smells like rotten eggs.

Now, I've heard people say it tastes like rotten eggs and I don't know what a rotten egg tastes like, so I'm not going to concur with that. But it does stink, that's for sure. But we know that it's going to stay like that unless something is put in there to filter it, right?

So James, he's calling for them to evaluate their tongue, to understand that if you have a filthy heart, that's what's going to come out of the mouth. What's the only thing that's going to help you there? How about a sanctified heart? What's going to keep you from spewing out those kinds of words, even out of a sanctified heart? How about a heart that's saturated with scripture?

He gives an illustration of agriculture. Can a fig or an olive or a grapevine vine bear figs? And of course, we said the answer is no. Jesus even used the similar illustration in Matthew seven when speaking of false teachers. He says, you'll know them by their fruits.

Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? And again, the answer is no. Each will produce after their kind. Right. Genesis 111.

Fig trees produce fig trees. Olive trees produce olives. Grapes produce grapes.

So a hateful heart cannot produce loving words or loving works. An unrighteous heart cannot produce righteous words or works.

The tongue has to be controlled, but humanly speaking, it can't be.

Look at verse eight. No one can tame the tongue. You and I can't do this. Only God can do this. Only God can tame the tongue.

So we have to be filled with the spirit, walking in the power of the spirit, applying God's word, being doers of the word at all times, we want to be led by the spirit of God, and that is a moment by moment process. That is something that's to go on every single day of our life all day long. But you have to, and I have to yield to the spirit of God for that to happen. And so if you're one who has trouble with your tongue, if you are one who constantly grieves the Holy Spirit by the words that you use, first of all, I would say, confess it to the Lord. Secondly, I would be reminded of

what scripture says in Ephesians 4:29, let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. He says, let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, be put away from you, along with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God. We have to mimic God, not mimic our fallen nature, not mimic unbelievers, not give into this flesh. We're to be kind, tender hearted, forgiving.

Our words are to be seasoned with grace. Colossians 4:2.

We're to put on the new self which has been made in the likeness of God, created in righteousness and holiness of the truth, and we're to lay aside all of the wickedness. In fact, if you go back to James and you go into chapter one, James tells how we are to receive the word. He says in verse 21, therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness in humility, receive the word implanted which is able to deliver your souls.

That's what we're to do again. We can't do this on our own. We need divine assistance. We need help.

And as we conclude our time together today, would you call on Christ to help you? Now, you may not be struggling with issues like this. I hope that you're not struggling with this. But in those moments, we're all susceptible, can happen to any of us. We need to pray like David did, to keep a muzzle over our tongues.

If you're here today and you have not experienced a relationship, a saving relationship with Jesus, I want to call you to come to him, confess him as Lord. Believe in your heart. God raised him from the dead. Call upon him, receive him, believe in him, and the Bible says you'll be saved. Father, I pray that you would open up all of our hearts to your word and what we've heard today and to examine our tongues, to examine

ourselves in light of what we've been learning here from these twelve verses in James.

I pray that our response will be that which is glorifying to you, that which brings praise to you, not the kind of response that James is talking about here, where 1 minute we're blessing you and another minute we're cursing either fellow brothers and sisters in Christ or just people in general. Lord, take those kinds of expressions, those kinds of words from our hearts and cause it to be that when we are in difficult moments, that it's the scripture that upholds us, it's the scripture that gives us the wisdom in how to respond and what we are to say, and those moments when we're not to say anything.

Thank you for this time we've had together, father. And thank you for every person that you have brought here. We praise your precious name. Now.