

10. Learning to Bridle Our Tongue – Part 2

In our last topic, we saw that what is in our hearts will determine the words we speak. If our heart is filled with evil, we will speak words that destroy. In contrast, if we are yielding our hearts to the Lord, we will think carefully before we speak so that our words will bring honor and glory to the Lord. As we concluded our last topic, with James 3:6, we saw that a tongue that speaks evil will have an affect on many other people. Our topic today builds on that thought by showing the dangers of an uncontrolled tongue. We want to help our children learn to speak with words that bring glory to God.

In James 3:7-8, we read, “For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” In these verses, we see that James gives us a comparison between the animals and the tongue of a person. Throughout history, people have tamed various kinds of animals. People have found that they can tame the animals and the birds. They can tame the reptiles and even the animals that live in the sea. However, we see that a tongue that is controlled by a heart filled with evil cannot be tamed.

Verse eight gives us two characteristics of the tongue of a person whose heart is controlled by evil. First, we see that the tongue of such a person is an unruly evil. The word that is translated “unruly” speaks of something that cannot be restrained or held back. Our hearts were controlled by evil before we placed our faith in Christ. That is why it is important to learn to yield our spirit to the Holy Spirit so that He can give us the strength to learn to control our words. James 1:19-20 says, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” Here, we see that the Lord gives us a pattern for learning to control our words as we yield to the Holy Spirit.

To control our words, we must first learn to listen carefully so we really hear what another person is saying. Many people are so busy preparing their answer, they never really listen to what another person is saying. Second, we must be slow to speak. This means that we take time to think and ask the Lord for wisdom before we answer. Third, we must be slow to wrath. The word that is translated “wrath” means *anger that shows itself by punishment*. When we discipline a person who has sinned, in love, we help them learn to correct what they did wrong. Punishment is when we are very angry at the person who sinned and we punish the person to get even. God says that such wrath will never produce His righteousness. In fact, in most cases, it will only cause the person to become more rebellious.

James 3:8 gives us a second characteristic of the tongue of a person whose heart is controlled by evil. We see that such a tongue is full of deadly poison. The word that is translated “poison”, when spoken of people, speaks of a person who uses words that injure and destroy others. Galatians 5:15 says, “But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!” The words “bite-devour-consume” speak of a process of wounding another person with words. “Bite” means *to wound a person by words*. “Devour” means *to continually wound a person with words*. “Consume” means *the last act of swallowing down* and has the thought of

destroying a person with evil words. We see the heart of a person who is controlled by evil will speak words that will completely destroy other people eventually.

James 3:9 goes on to say, “With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.” In the time of James, it was normal for the Jews to say “Blessed be God” when they spoke of God. This was a quotation from the final verse of Psalm 68. When the Jews said this, in the time of Christ, it did not mean those words came from the heart. In Matthew 23:27, Christ said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men’s* bones and all uncleanness.” Here, we see one of the reasons Christ called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites. They would bless God to appear beautiful. At the same time, because their hearts were filled with evil, they spoke evil words about Christ and many other people.

James said that people actually curse God when they curse other people. In Genesis 1:26, we read, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’” Here, we see that God made us, as people, in His own image. That is why God says that people are actually cursing Him when they curse another person, because that person is created in the image of God.

We see that people who have not placed their faith in Christ commonly curse other people. As a result, that is why James wrote, in James 3:10-12, “Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.” Several times in the book of James, we see that James uses the phrase, “my brethren”. We see that verse ten is one of the places where James uses this phrase. As a result, we see that even some of those who claimed to be Christians were blessing God, yet cursing people. James said that cursing people, who are made in the image of God, is not a form of appropriate language for Christians and gave several illustrations to back his words.

First, James asked if a spring of water could give both fresh and bitter water from the same opening. In Exodus 15:23-26, after the people of Israel left Egypt, they came to a place that was named “Marah” which means *bitter* because the water was bitter. God performed a miracle and changed that water and made it sweet. Once that water became sweet, there was no more bitter water. In the same way, once Christ came into our lives, and performed a miracle by giving us a new nature, God says that our words should also become sweet instead of bitter. When we realize that the Lord has performed a miracle in our lives, it should be our desire to demonstrate that miracle by yielding our lives to the Lord and asking Him to give us His power to bless others just as we bless Him.

Second, James asked in verse 12 if a fig tree could produce olives or a grapevine produce figs. On the third day of creation, Genesis 1:12 says, “And the earth brought forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed according to its kind, and the tree *that* yields fruit, whose seed *is* in itself according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good.” Here, we see that when God created the fruit trees, He said that

each fruit tree would produce the kind of fruit God had designed it to produce. In addition, God said that seeds that came from the plants would produce the same kinds of trees or plants that produced them. As a result, no person on the earth has ever developed a fig tree that produced olives.

In the same way, in 2 Corinthians 5:17, God says, “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” We would expect those who have evil hearts to produce evil words when they speak, because they have not placed their faith in Christ. However, since we have been made a new creation with a new nature, God says that as Christians, we will produce the kind of words which show that the Lord has made us a new creation. Instead of speaking evil words, we need to pray the same prayer Paul asked others to pray for him. When Paul asked people to pray for him, in Ephesians 6:19-20, he asked them to pray, “And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” We need to pray the same prayer for ourselves.

Third, James said, in verse 12, that no spring of water produces both salt water and fresh water. The Dead Sea is located near the south end of the land of Israel. It is much saltier than even the oceans. You could never quench your thirst with that water. Here, we see that no spring of water can produce both salt water and fresh water. If a spring of water produces salty water, that spring of water will never quench your thirst. In contrast, if a spring of water produces fresh water, that water will produce good drinking water for both people and animals and quench their thirst.

We also see that Scripture talks about living water. Christ told the woman at the well, in John 4:14, “But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” Then, Christ said again, in John 7:37-39, “On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” First, we see that Christ offers us living water. Then, we see that once we have received living water, rivers of living water will flow out of our hearts.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that because they have a new nature, living water will flow from their hearts. It is a great privilege to help them learn to share that living water with others so that others can also have eternal life. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to share that living water with those who do not yet know Christ.