

Text— James 3:1-12

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Sins of all sorts are practiced in modern society, including sins of filthy speech, and we Christians are not void of sinning, including committing sins of the tongue, which is why Colossians 3:5-11 instructs, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.” Hence, we are to fight all the temptations to sin which come upon us from the devil, the world, and our own corrupt flesh.

Our Scripture selection aims specifically at us Christians and our all-too-common use of sinful speech, for our text urges us:

“STRIVE TO RESTRAIN YOUR TONGUE”

With that as our theme may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) Why we need to strive to restrain our tongue
- 2) What we need to always remember if we would truly strive to restrain our tongue and actually do so

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Verse 1, ----- (James 3:1)

If we look back at James 1:1-2 we learn that James was “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,” and we also observe that the epistle was first addressed to James’ “brethren” – his fellow Christians – who were of the “twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” So, Jewish Christians were initially addressed by James in his epistle which he penned by inspiration of God.

Now, in the opening verse of our sermon text James writes: *My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.* Accordingly, it seems there was a tendency among the early Jewish converts to Christianity for many of them to desire to speak, domineer, and rule over other folks in the congregations which they attended, for James warned them, saying: *My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.* Hence, a larger number of James’ fellow Christians needed to be pupils of the Word of God rather than teachers of it.

Fellow Christians, the same words of warning need to be heeded today because we all dwell in sinful flesh which desires to play the big-shot over others since our sinful hearts are inclined to be pompous and pride-filled.

Think about it. Numerous modern-day churches wearing the label “Christian” encourage and permit “many masters” in their congregations in order to gain and boast big membership numbers. Yeah, such churches – or “worship-centers” as they are frequently called – will permit just about anybody to get up and address the congregation regardless of whether or not the person has the proper Biblically-based training and an actual call from the Lord. Thus, our text warns Christians yet today: *My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.*

Realize that leading and teaching a congregation is a responsibility that will result in greater condemnation of the leader on Judgment Day if that person does not perform his calling, his duties, in full accord with God’s Word. Hebrews 13:17

says, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." Yes, note well that all pastors will give an account to God, regarding how they've carried out their calling.

Furthermore, congregants must remember the exception to the rule of obeying their pastor, for Acts 5:29 informs us, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Indeed, if a pastor instructs people to do anything contrary to the Holy Bible, the people are to obey God's Word and disobey that pastor, for in truth both pastor and people have ONE MASTER who is the Lord! The Lord Jesus declares in Matthew 23:8-10, "be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ." Let us therefore be humble Christians, striving to restrain our tongue which our sinful flesh urges us to use in an arrogant domineering manner when we have no call to do so.

Verse 2, -----. (James 3:2)

James does not hold back on giving us the plain truth, for he says: *in many things we offend all*. Indeed, fellow Christians, every one of us sins in many ways each and every day, "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

James puts our most common offense in the forefront as he writes: *If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body*. Yeah, if we would be honest we've got to admit that we most often sin with our tongue— that's why we need to strive to restrain our tongue. Come on folks, let's admit that we surely offend in word, for we all cuss and/or use our mouths to tell off-color jokes, etcetera. Hence, we need to daily repent of such sins, and we need to strive to restrain our tongue.

Verses 3-5, -----. (James 3:3-5)

Even though the tongue of each of us human beings is a very small member of the body compared to other members, it can do a lot of good OR a lot of damage. To emphasize the effectiveness of one's relatively small tongue, James by way of comparison has us think of a horse which is a large animal and is yet directed about by a small bit in its mouth which is pulled by the rider's reins; and then, there are huge ships which are navigated by use of a rudder which is quite small in comparison to the size of the ship. Likewise, *the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!*

The tongue can speak a wrong word, a lie, and can thereby cause immense problems for people. On the other hand, a true and kind word can be uttered by the tongue to calm folks. It's as we read in Proverbs 15:1-2, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness." Let us never forget that Proverbs 6:16-19 informs us, "These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." Oh, the Lord God hates it when people use their tongues to lie, for "the devil... is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44) Thus, we need to strive to restrain our tongue lest we deliberately and wilfully offend the Lord.

Verse 6, -----. (James 3:6)

Because we are sinners, our tongues are dangerous despite being small in size, for James by inspiration of God says: *the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell*.

Oh, we've all got to admit how true it is that we are prone to sinful speech!

Verses 7 & 8, -----. (James 3:7-8)

Even in man's fallen sinful state, man still has "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." (Genesis 1:26) *For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind.* Think about it. There are entertainment events in which one can view trained tigers, lions, seals, porpoises, doves, and so forth. Some folks have even trained snakes to respond to the playing of a flute as that snake will rise up from a basket and sway to the tune. However, the truth remains that *the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*

Verses 9 & 10, -----. (James 3:9-10)

My friends, we all need to strive to restrain our tongue because of what we do with it, for our text clearly states: *Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.* Indeed, we use our tongue for totally opposing purposes – good and evil – which is NOT to be the case!

It is good and right that we pray, praise, and give thanks to God with our tongue; but, it is evil and wrong that we curse fellow human beings with the very same tongue.

Now, in all honesty we Christians must admit that it is easy for us to bless God since we know He is so good and merciful to us in that He sent us our Savior, His only begotten Son, for 1 John 4:9-10 relates, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the

propitiation for our sins." Hence, in response to God's love we wish to pray, praise, and give thanks to Him, for, "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

However, it is much more difficult for us Christians to bless our fellow human beings, especially if they have wronged us; and yet, Romans 12:14 commands: "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not." Yes, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, says in Matthew 5:43-45, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Additionally, 1 Peter 3:10-12 declares in no uncertain terms, "he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." Therefore, we need to strive to restrain our tongue because God would have us do so.

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As we ponder our text to its conclusion, let us see what we need to always remember if we would truly strive to restrain our tongue and actually do so.

Verse 10, -----. (James 3:10)

Note well that blessing AND cursing are NOT to proceed from our mouth. Rather, we Christians are to use our tongue only for blessing and never for cursing. Thus, we must truly strive to restrain our tongue!

So, if we would truly strive to restrain our tongue, it behooves us to constantly keep in mind the fact

that God does not wish us to use any evil speech.

Verses 11 & 12, -----. (James 3:11-12)

In these two concluding verses of our text, James, by way of illustrations, supplies us with another reason why we are to strive to restrain our tongue, for James writes: *Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.*

Think about what James is getting at. As a fountain supplies one type of water and a tree or vine supplies but one type of fruit, so we Christians are to bring forth the proper wholesome fruits of the faith we have in Jesus Christ. When sinful speech and filthy communication flows from our mouth such things are NOT fruits of faith but are rather products of our sinful flesh. We Christians can bring shame on our Savior's name when we fail to restrain our tongue.

Let us remember the words of Psalm 34:13-16, where we read, "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth."

Let us never forget, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-10; Galatians 5:6) Accordingly, let us strive to restrain our tongue by continuing in the faith of Jesus Christ, and by

persisting in God's Word which is able to build us up in the faith and direct us concerning proper fruits of a living faith in the Lord Jesus.

My friends in Christ, we cannot go-it-alone and expect to have any success in restraining our tongue, for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ says in John 15:5-8, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." Hence, we need the Lord's gracious help and guidance if we would truly strive to restrain our tongue and do so. We need to pray to Jesus regularly for His help!

Furthermore, when we blow it and fall into sin, we need to turn to Jesus with a penitent heart and beg Him to forgive us and to strengthen us in the faith so that we may continue to battle the temptations which come upon us, for, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." (1 John 1:8-10)

Fellow Christians, it's not easy to battle the devil, the wicked world, and our own sinful flesh; nevertheless, we are to do so lest we lose our faith.

Let us daily and sincerely repent of our sins. Let us keep our full trust and confidence in Christ Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord. And, let us go forward remembering our Scripture selection which urges us: strive to restrain your tongue. Amen.

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