

*A minister once had his congregation a little bit worried, when he said to them, “I’m now going to show to you that part of my body, which I don’t let out very often, but it causes me the greatest temptation, and leads me into the greatest of sins. And a number of old ladies pretended to avert their eyes, and then he did this (poked out his tongue).*

Does anyone here **not** have trouble with their tongue?

If the way you use your tongue, is completely under control, and completely righteous, then you’re the perfect man or the perfect woman...

Because James says something, which I haven’t really thought about before, but it is so true: The tongue, is the hardest part of our bodies, to get under control. And what the tongue says, can lead our whole body, either into righteousness, or into sin.

James explains it: Just like with a bit (in a horse’s mouth), you can control the whole horse. (or mostly anyway). Or like a rudder on a ship – with this little rudder, you can steer a massive ship. And with your tongue, you can lead your whole body either into righteousness, or into sin.

The tongue, is such a very small part of us. It may seem like it doesn’t really matter that much. And what are words anyway? – how can **words** hurt us? You know, the old saying, “*Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me...*” Well, that is so totally untrue. Words have a great **deal** of power:

- They can have healing power, or they can have destructive power.
- They can be encouraging, or they can be **discouraging**.

- They can be spirit and life, or they can come from the fires of hell, and lead to death.
- Words can build up, and words can tear down.
- They can bless or they can curse...
- They can set free, or they can bind us up
- Our tongues can be inviting and evangelical, or they can be excluding and repulsive.
- With our tongues, we can voice purity or profanity
- We can sing praises, or we can blurt blasphemy
- With your tongue, you can share the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and bring life and hope,,, or you can gossip lies and half-truths....
- With your tongue, you can honour, or you can dishonour...

The tongue, is the most powerful, and yet **uncontrollable** part of our bodies.

Once your tongue forms a word, and it pops out of your mouth, you can never get it back again. Who among us, has **not** ever said something and then later on regretted what we said, and wished we could take it back again... but of course, it was too late... It's out there – it's **never** coming back.

In Proverbs, it tells us not to be too quick to speak.

Proverbs 17:

<sup>27</sup> Whoever restrains his words has knowledge.....

it says:

**28 Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.**

*I had a conversation with somebody once, and actually I've had numerous conversations similar to it, over recent years... And this person was telling me that they don't have a lot of friends in their community, because they've said a few things on Facebook, that people didn't like... And so they sort of cut them off...*

*And of course, in the light of James 3 – about taming the tongue. This is an example of how what we say, can have long-lasting ramifications for our whole lives. Whether it be verbally, when we speak to somebody, and the wrong words pop out, or if it be on social media, where we write something that could possibly be read by hundreds, or even thousands of people,,, the words that we use, can have long-lasting consequences.*

*And I have heard so many stories, of broken relationships, because of what has been written on social media...*

Our words, can have long-lasting ramifications for our whole lives.

Husbands and wives – what **you** say to each other, can hurt and wound, and tear down each other. Your words can bring dishonour, where honour is due.

*In the last few weeks (summer time in Australia) bush fires have been horrendous in Victoria, Western Australia, and Tasmania. On a hot, dry, windy day, one spark – one match – one cigarette butt – one hot exhaust, can begin a blaze that becomes enormous, and uncontrollable, and destructive, and deadly...*

And my tongue, can be just like that. And so can yours:

- One comment, about something we perceive about somebody else, can become a rumour of lies, that spreads throughout the community, and destroys a life.
- But even if it **is** true, gossip is ugly. Why would we do it? ... I'll tell you why: Because with gossip, for **one** moment, **I** become the centre of attention, because I have this juicy bit of news. One little spark though, and it destroys a forest.
- Or maybe you let a few swear words out, and soon the kids are copying you. A spark that has begun a fire...
- What about in a church? A few negative statements get made, and it picks up momentum. And soon discontent and negativity has invaded that whole church. One spark, has become a destructive fire.

James describes the tongue as “**a restless evil, full of deadly poison.**” Well, that’s a bit harsh isn’t it? But it’s true.

*In one church I was in, a widow told me that she will never forgive a certain man, because of what he said to her, just after her husband had died... And yet the thing is, the person*

*who hurt her – well he wasn't **trying** to be hurtful. He was somebody who craves attention. And so he always had to have something to say. And that something, always had to be a bit different to what anybody else would say. And something came to his mind, and he said it. And once those words were out, there was no getting them back. And she was deeply offended. Those careless words, created a rift in the fellowship of that church. And to my knowledge, it's still not healed.*

And the tongue is “**a restless evil**, – it just doesn't give up. We have to **always** be watching our tongues – trying to restrain them – trying to control them...

The tongue, is a bit like the terminator. “*It can't be reasoned with, it can't be bargained with. It doesn't feel pity of remorse or fear and it absolutely will not stop. Ever. Until you are dead<sup>t</sup>.*”

None of us are perfect, and the **last** part of us to be perfected, is the tongue. And so, no matter how long you've been a disciple of Jesus Christ, you still have to keep battling with the tongue. It will not stop... Until I'm dead...

And I have to try and think about how other people will perceive what I have said. I might not **mean** to give offence. I might not **mean** to belittle... But my words have done exactly that, without me thinking....

James says, it stains the whole body. That's the **reverse** of pure religion. Back in 1:27

**27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself **unstained** from the world.**

But the tongue, stains the whole body. What I say, can make me filthy:

- A dirty joke
- Bad language
- Snide remarks
- Self-promotion – prideful language
- Gossip
- Rumour
- Innuendo
- Criticism
- Negativity
- Deception
- Lies
- Dishonour

Words, are **not** just words – they stain the whole body.

And we can be so double-minded in the words we speak, can't we? We can bless God, and say, "Isn't God wonderful"... But then we curse people, who are made in the image of God????

*When we were living outside of Dalby, we put down a bore. And I was very keen to see, not just how much water we got, but the quality of that water. Was it going to be too salty? Or was it going to be good for the garden? And thank God, it was fine...*

*But one thing I knew for sure, is if it came up as fresh water, it wouldn't be salty the next day. That bore had one source for the water. And if it was true to its source, if it was fresh, it would be fresh tomorrow.*

And James says, <sup>11</sup> Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? <sup>12</sup> Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

He was basically quoting Jesus: Luke 6:<sup>43</sup> **"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, <sup>44</sup> for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. <sup>45</sup> The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.**

What's in the heart, comes out through the mouth. And there is something incongruous, about curses coming out of the same mouth that blesses God.

*I remember having a conversation with a man, who claims to be Christian. And he was criticising another Christian, because they had a go at him about his foul mouth. When he is in the company of Christians, his language is pure, and you can't fault him. But put him with a different crowd, and he'd swear like a trooper... And when another Christian took him*

*to task over it, in his pride, he would say “Well, that’s just me... And the words I use, well they don’t make any difference...”*

Don’t they?

And with our tongues:

- Maybe **you’ve** got issues with swearing
- Maybe you’ve got issues with gossip. By the way, we tend to think of the little old ladies as being the gossips – You know, the worst gossips I’ve ever come across, have been in the shearing shed...
- Maybe we’ve got issues with criticising
- Or crude jokes.
- Maybe you just blurt out hurtful things, and you’re totally oblivious to what you’ve said.
- Maybe it’s just pride – And so we tell stories to make ourselves look good
- Or maybe it’s self-justification – telling our side of a story – to set people straight.
- Maybe it’s just seeking the attention of others – we’re not content to be in the background – we’ve just gotta say something, to draw attention to ourselves.

The tongue’s a bit of a worry, isn’t it?... And every animal can be tamed. Lions; Tigers; Bears; monkeys; even reptiles can be trained.... But no human can tame a tongue.... It’s just as well God can, hey... And so I thank God, for the sanctifying work of His Holy Spirit.

*When Robyn and I were first married (and even before we were married), she would, multiple times a day, chip me for being “tactless”. Now, I know you probably find that very hard to believe – that I would ever say anything tactless... but*

*apparently I do. I would say something, and she would just cringe... And then she'd chip me.*

*She doesn't chip me so much any more. I still haven't worked out if she's just given up, or whether God is actually changing my heart. I hope it is the fact that God is changing my heart.*

Because if He can tame the tongue of the “tactless”, then that's a huge blessing for me.

So, that's a pretty simple and practical message, isn't it, about the tongue, and what we say. And I'm pretty sure, we've all got something practical to take home with us... Yeah?

Well, that's **one** level of the message. Did you know there's 2 levels to this bible reading? One is a message to all of us, about how we control our own tongue. The other, is a message about leadership in the church. Did you notice how the reading began? **3** Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. <sup>2</sup> For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

There's a whole nother level, about leadership – about teachers within the church. Did you notice, that James kept using the word “body”? And we know, the church is a body, don't we?

To be a teacher in the church, is a blessing, but it's also a terrifying responsibility. Teachers will be judged with greater strictness. Jesus said, <sup>Matthew 18:6</sup> ... **whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.**

Teaching in the church, is a terrifying responsibility. What if we don't get it right?

*For those of you who were in church last week, I don't know if you noticed my nervousness,, did you??? – when I preached on the place of works in salvation. I was almost afraid. I was physically stressed. In the week leading up to it, (and it's gradually decreasing now, because it takes a while for stress to go) But I was stressed. I could physically feel the effects of that stress in my body.*

*Why was I stressed? Because to be true to the Scriptures, about faith and works and salvation, I had to try and explain “How we are saved by faith alone”, but “Faith alone won't save us.” ... And it is critical, that I teach you what the Scriptures say. But at the same time, some very strongly held theologies, will try and explain the scriptures away... And I wanted to get it right. And I didn't want other teachers to judge me, and to brand me as teaching “legalism”. I just want to honour God, and be true to His word....*

It is a terrifying responsibility to be a teacher in the church. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. In fact, if God is calling you to be a teacher in His church, don't you dare put it

off – God has given all of us talents, and we have to use them for His glory...

So, if the church is the body, its teachers are the tongue. No teacher is perfect. I'm not perfect. Verse 2: <sup>2</sup> For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. <sup>3</sup> If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well.

Alright, notice that James is referring to “we”. He is acknowledging that **he** is a teacher. And he knows, that his teaching, is guiding the whole body of the church.

And I pray the Lord will make me a good teacher. I pray that those of **you**, who are teachers, may be guided by the Lord in what **you** teach... Because what we teachers teach, can steer the direction, of the whole church.

- If a teacher in the church begins to teach prosperity theology, guess what happens? The church becomes more concerned about money than they are about loving their neighbour.
- If a teacher in the church begins teaching legalism, and the keeping of religious rules and regulations, that church will become more and more legalistic.
- If a teacher in the church begins teaching that it's all about what we believe, and not about what we do, that

church will become more and more loose with its morals and its standards will sag.

- If a teacher in the church begins to teach liberal theology, guess what happens? The church becomes more and more liberal. And that church will listen more and more to the world, and less and less to the Holy Spirit.
- If the teachers in the church preach “tolerance” and “love”, but downplay “judgment” and “sacrifice”, the whole nature of the gospel can change in a matter of years, or maybe even months...
- I have had to leave a denomination, because the leaders of that church – the rudder of the ocean-liner – were steering that church on a course to destruction.

James said: **The tongue** (teachers) **is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.**

Where does false teaching come from? It comes from hell. And what are the effects in the church? It stains the whole body... False teachers, can stain the whole church. And after a lot of years, God said “Go. Get out.”

But let's not harp on about the past. Let's talk about the future. If I, or any other teacher in Bush Disciples, begin to teach rubbish, you make sure you cut that tongue out, won't you, before it stains the whole body...

Those who teach, have a terrifying responsibility. It is so important to get it right. So, how do we tell a good teacher from a bad teacher?

Well, let me tell ya, it's not about our presentation style. It's not about our ability to communicate. It's not about how engaging we are. We can tell a good teacher, by their fruit:

- Do they one minute bless God, and then the next minute they're off swearing their heads off?
- Do they one minute, flatter people, and then when they don't get their way, venom begins to flow?
- And what about their actions? A good tree bears good fruit. A bad tree bears bad fruit. You don't get figs from a thorn bush, or grapes from a bramble bush.

You can tell a false teacher, by their fruit... But only if we're looking for it.

So, that's the second level. The third level... There is no third level. I need to go on holidays. Teaching in the church is a stressful job. It's a terrifying responsibility. And I need a holiday. I'll be back in a couple of weeks.

Questions???

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/terminator/quotes/>