THE UNBRIDLED TONGUE
James 1:26; 3:1-12

Despite all our advancements through time, it seems that man can still say something stupid. Despite the reflection we can exhibit in our life on spiritual things, it seems that we can still speak “off the cuff” and hurt someone, directly or indirectly. God has said plenty on this subject, and we should meditate on what His Word can tell us through example about our individual voices.

We must work to control what we say, and make sure it is profitable for God.

I. CONTROLLING OUR WORDS (v. 1-6)

A. “Be not many masters…” (v. 1)
1. Not saying no one should teach, but if a man is going to teach, he should be prepared to teach, and for the influence involved in that position.
2. Elders - “Apt to teach…” (1 Tim 3:2)
   a. “it’s okay if I don’t end up being an elder” -2 Tim 2:24-25 – “the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all [men], apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;” – This applies to EVERY CHRISTIAN!

B. “if any man offend not in word… …is a perfect man.” (v. 2)
1. “…able also to bridle the whole body.”
   a. If we can control what we say, everything else should become easy.
   b. This is a difficult place to get to, as we will see.

2. Examples – bits in horses; rudders in ships (vv. 3-4)
   a. Our speech is integral in our life. Our “conversation” directs our life.
      -“conversation”: “manner of life, behavior, conduct”

C. The tongue (vv. 5-6)
1. Tongue, like bit and rudder, is a small part of the body, yet directs so much.
2. Responsible for:
   a. Good - Teaching God’s Word; encouragement; exhortation
   b. Evil - Causing war, dividing friends, churches, causing sin
3. “boasteth” - This part of the body can “talk big”
4. “how great a matter a little fire kindleth!” - It just takes one match.
   (Smoky Bear - Forest fires have become wildfires)
5. “the tongue is a fire…”
   a. “a world of iniquity” - every possible evil can get its root from our voice, regardless of whether it’s something we say to ourselves or to others.
   b. “it defileth our whole body” - Speech that reflects negatively on us can guide our action
   c. “setteth on fire the course of nature” - The way we speak will be picked up by our children (“Where did little Johnny learn to talk like that?” YOU!) TV - what is the child told daily?!
   d. “set on fire of hell” - This fire is not just any carnal fire - it is directly from the devil. The only way the devil has ever
exerted any power is within us. If we intend to resist him, and expel him from our lives, we must control the tongue.

II. SINS OF THE TONGUE (7-12)
A. Digress momentarily and consider some elements of our speech that can be extremely damaging, especially among those within the Body of Christ. (Matt. 15:11 “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.”)

1. Blasphemy
   a. “railing... slander... impious and reproachful speech injurious to divine majesty” (strong’s)
   b. Col. 3:8 – “But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.”

2. Corrupt Communication
   a. “rotten, putrid... unfit for use, worthless” (strong’s)
   b. Eph 4:29 – “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”

3. Clamor
   a. “a crying [or] outcry” (strong’s)
   b. Eph. 4:31 – “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:”

4. Murmuring
   a. “a secret displeasure not openly avowed” (strong’s)
   b. Jude 16 – “These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling [words], having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.”
   c. Clamor and murmuring can lead to wedges driven between brethren in a quiet, inconspicuous way.

5. Gossip/Slander
   a. “whispering, defamation, evil report” (strong’s)
   b. Psalm 101:5a – “Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off...”
   c. How do I know I’m gossiping?
      - ask yourself – what is the PURPOSE of this particular conversation?
      - Telling or listening to an uncomplimentary thing about someone for the purpose of being entertained/building up my own ego/spite/revenge/just to talk
      - A question to settle in our own minds. We all do it, and it’s easy to slip into.
   d. 1 Tim. 5:13 – Paul wrote concerning widows who have left their first faith: “they learn [to be] idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.”
      - Idleness is something to fight. The more active we are in the Kingdom, the less this will happen!

6. Whispering/Backbiting
a. “a whispering, secret slandering” – like gossip, but quieter.
b. Jesus commanded that when we have an issue with a brother, we should go to that person and settle the problem (Matt. 18:15). Too often, we love to talk behind someone’s back about them. It’s a cowardly move, and not something that God tolerates.
c. In these actions, we harm someone else’s reputation, and our own!
d. Proverbs 10:26 – "Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; And where there is no talebearer, strife ceases."

7. Lying
   a. Eph. 4:25 – “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.”
   b. Devil is called the father of lies in John 8:44 – his lie to Eve brought about the fall of man.

III. The untamable tongue (v. 8)
1. The tongue is grouped with the animals in v. 7 – all tamed by man
2. “No MAN” – Man cannot tame it, but God can if we let Him!
3. The same mouth gives “blessing and cursing” (v. 10)
   a. Such distant extremes should not be the result of our speech.
4. We should not allow evil speech to exist in our “good conversation” (1 Pet 3:16 – “Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.”) – If we don’t have “good conversation”, a good way of life, we shame the Gospel and Jesus. This all starts in what we SAY!
   a. If we are hateful in our speech toward someone who might think they’re better than us, how will we ever influence that person?
   b. If we are hateful in our speech toward those of the world, how will we EVER help open their eyes to see Jesus?

Luke 18: 9-14 – What are you saying to God?

Next time, we’ll discuss the rest of this chapter, and find out what positive wisdom we can use within our words to “reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine”. We’ve seen the evil that is caused through our words, but let’s never forget the words of God’s wisdom that can bring peace among us.