



Faith and the Tongue

The Test Marks of a Living Faith

Main point: Faith can be tested by its production of self-control with our speech.

Expositional Outline

A. The tongue has the power to *direct*. (vv.1-4)

1. A note of caution (v.1)
2. A note of realism (v.2)
 - a. A bit in a horse's mouth (v.3)
 - b. A rudder of a large ship (v.4)

B. The tongue has the power to *destroy*. (vv.5-8)

1. A spark of fire that sets a forest ablaze (v.5)
 - a. The tongue is like its own world. (v.6a)
 - b. The tongue defiles the whole person. (v.6b)
 - c. The tongue consumes the entire course of one's life. (v.6c)
 - d. The tongue can send people to hell. (v.6d)
2. A dangerous animal (vv.7-8)
 - a. The ability to tame creatures is a reality. (v.7)
 - b. The inability to tame the tongue is a tragedy. (v.8)

C. The tongue has the power to *delight*. (vv.9-12)

1. How our speech reveals inconsistency toward God (vv.9-10)
2. How our inconsistent speech is contrary to nature (vv.11-12)

Interpretative discussion questions:

There are six pictures James uses to unpack much sobering truth about the tongue. Consider each picture and make personal application.

Directs: A bit and a rudder—small and controlled by a strong hand from the inside and against forces from the outside (wild nature, great winds).

- What means of grace has God appointed to deal with the old nature (indwelling sin) from within and the strong temptations from the world without? Read Romans 8:1-9, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, Galatians 5:16-24, and 6:14-15.

Destroys: A fire and a dangerous animal—starts small, spreads fast, and is very destructive.

The tongue is compared to a fire, but what else is a fire compared to according to Jeremiah 23:28-29 and Hebrew 1:7? On the positive side, fire has a threefold work:

- It *consumes*—how can you let God's Word consume your mind this week?
- It *purifies*—what do you need God's Word to cleanse in your heart?
- It *reveals*—do you desire a life of integrity and holiness?

Delights: A fountain and a fig tree—provides refreshment and fruit.

- The source of a fountain and the root of a tree—produces the kind of water and fruit which blesses or harms others. Read Proverbs 4:23 and close in prayerful meditation seeking God's grace.

Memory verse for lesson 11:

- **James 3:2**—*For we all stumble in many ways. if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.*



Insights on Our Tongue:

Keith Brazier

"He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding."—**Proverbs 17:27**

When we were young children speaking inappropriately in front of an adult, usually a swift hand or a cross look would put us back in line. As teenage boys trying to assert dominance in public through foul and reckless speech, we were bound to run across some tough older man who would ask, "Do you kiss your mother with that mouth?" The question was more of a warning than a rebuke, which meant that, "you had better be quiet before I have to silence you." It is amazing how such a small organ can be offensive, destructive, and detrimental to your own well-being at the same time.

That which proceeds from our mouths directly highlights just how wretched the human heart is. Often times, the words are intentional and we spit them, desiring to hit our mark. Even more disheartening are the painful

words that just seem to fly out without thought, seemingly out of nowhere. They are so brutal that they leave the hearer stunned. We are puzzled and may even wish to take it all back. Too late—you expressed exactly what was inside. There is no room for excuses and trying to explain away what you *meant* to say. Ready-made defenses like “I speak my mind” or “Well, the truth hurts” demonstrate the depravity of the human heart and strengthen the case for the need to control one’s tongue. Even when sharing truth or correcting others, words need to be well chosen and fruitful (*Col.4:6; Eph.4:29*). Thankfully, we can immediately put these principles into action. Today, you can exercise spiritual maturity in this area by consciously controlling your speech.

© July 9, 2018 The Church at South Mountain

Previous versions: March 31, 2018; April 10, 22, 29, 2018; May 6, 13, 21, 2018;
June 3, 17, 20, 26, 2018; July 8, 2018

You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred.

Any exceptions to the above must be approved by The Church at South Mountain.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy:

© The Church at South Mountain. Website: casm.org

While all reasonable attempts have been taken to trace the literary and biblical sources used by the author, due to the nature of some of the original materials (old audio/radio or live preaching events), some have been impossible to locate. Any information regarding the origin of any unreferenced statements or quotations is welcomed and will be included in the next revision of the study.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible: 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation.