

Bridle it!

Introduction

The topic that is repeated over and over in the Book of Proverbs is the tongue and our speech. There are more proverbs directed at the *words* we say and the *way* we say them than anything else. Solomon said, “*The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences*” (Prov. 18:21).

James says in **his Letter**, “*Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.*”

We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches.

But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God.

And so, blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring (3:1-12).

Friends, what we say to others or what they say to us affect us more often than we care to admit. Whoever said ‘*Stick and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me*’, does not live in this world... because words can do greater damage than break bones. Physical harm is only superficial... while words can cut deep into the heart, whether for good or for bad. **Proverbs** says, “*Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing*” (12:18).

Words have the power to hurt or heal... to build-up or tear down people... to build or destroy relationships. We tend to use the worst language with those we are closest to. The very people we should be building-up the most are the ones we tear down. Around strangers we act nice... saying kind and helpful things, but as soon as we are with family we seem to act differently. The truth is, the person you are when you are around your family is the real you.

This message considers what God has to say about an uncontrolled mouth, but more importantly, how it can be controlled. The **Book of Proverbs** gives us at least three traits that identify an uncontrolled mouth... A lying mouth, a gossiping mouth, and a foul mouth.

1. A lying mouth.

Proverbs says, *“The Lord detests lying lips, but He delights in those who tell the truth”* (12:22)

*“There are six things the LORD hates— no, seven things he detests: haughty eyes, **a lying tongue**, hands that kill the innocent, a heart that plots evil, feet that race to do wrong, **a false witness who pours out lies**, a person who sows discord in a family”* (6:16-19).

Two of the seven things that God hates most involve lying. Why does God hate lying? Because lying and liars are extreme opposites of God's nature! Jesus says, *“I am the way, the **truth** and the life”* (Jn. 14:6).

2. A gossiping mouth

In the KJV version of the Bible, a ‘gossip’ is called a *talebearer* or a *whisperer*. A gossip is someone who repeats private affairs of others in order to put them down and build themselves up. One thing that makes gossip so dangerous and destructive is that, we all by nature love to hear it. **Proverbs** says... *“Rumors are dainty morsels that sink deep into one’s heart”* (18:8).

Why do we like to hear gossip? Because we have the mistaken idea that when other people look bad, we look better. Some people justify gossip by saying, ‘It’s the truth’. God, however, says the truth must be handled correctly, to help... not hurt people.

History is littered with broken relationships that have resulted from gossip. The only reason a loving Christian should share sensitive personal information is to help the person or to protect someone else from being hurt by that person.

3. A foul mouth

In our culture, profanity has become more and more commonplace and acceptable. This includes sexual innuendos. **Proverbs** says... *“Avoid all perverse talk; stay away from corrupt speech”* (4:24).

The Hebrew word translated ‘corrupt’ or ‘perverse’ means foul or deviating from what is considered right. According to a study conducted by an American university, profanity during primetime television increased by 58% between 1997 and 2004 (7 years). The **Book of Ephesians** says,

- *“Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them”* (4:29).
- *“Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you”* (5:4).
- And so, the uncontrolled mouth is a **lying** mouth, a **gossiping** mouth, and a **foul** mouth.
- **“Woe is me”** you might ask... **“How can I master such a mouth!”**

Well, there are at least four things we can do that will make a huge difference...

1. Always be candid

Being candid means being honest and not deceitful. **Proverbs** says, *“An honest answer is like a kiss of friendship”* (24:26).

When we speak lies it's the same as saying "I don't love you." Being candid and honest means telling people what they need to hear, not what they want to hear. **Proverbs** says, *"Words from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy"* (27:6).

At times telling the truth is not easy... in fact, it can be quite hard and scary. However, we are called to be truth-tellers. Paul says in the **Book of Ephesians**... *"Stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body"* (4:25).

If we truly care for others, we will tell them the truth to help them, even if it might make them angry with us. But remember this... **Always compliment in public and correct in private**. No marriage, friendship, or other relationship can survive unless it is founded upon honesty.

2. Always be confidential

There are very few people who can be trusted with sensitive, personal information. We all need people with whom we can share our hurts, fears, and frustrations. When someone shares personal, private information with us, we need to remember these truths in **Proverbs**: *"A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter"* (11:13), *"He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends"* (17:9). One of the quickest ways to hurt people is to breach confidence.

3. Always be constructive

People today are starving for encouragement. Few things are needed more in our world today than constructive words... words that heal, uplift, and encourage! **Proverbs** says, *"Kind words are like honey – sweet to the soul and healthy for the body"* (16:24).

People are starving for encouragement! We should always be on the lookout for opportunities God gives us to speak a word of encouragement to someone in our circle of life. **Proverbs** says... *"Timely advice is lovely, like golden apples in a silver basket"* (25:11).

One of the greatest things you can gift to someone is meaningful encouragement at a time of fellowship at a café, or somewhere else that is suitable.

4. Always be constrained

Sometimes the wisest thing we can do is constrain our mouths and say little or nothing at all. We've all suffered from the proverbial *foot in mouth disease*. One of the most frequent complaints from couples who are struggling in their marriage is *"he or she doesn't listen to me!"*

When we get to know people, we sometimes think we know what they are going to say before they say it. So, we just listen to the first part of the comment or question and then start responding. **Proverbs** says, *"Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish"* (18:13).

Another right time to constrain our mouths is when someone says something very foolish. Getting into a debate with a fool is a big mistake. **Proverbs** says, *"Don't answer the foolish arguments of fools, or you will become as foolish as they are"* (26:4).

In Conclusion

James, the brother of Jesus said, *"If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you*

are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless” (1:26).

James reminds us that our Christian faith should have a bearing on the quality of words we speak and how we say them. As Christians, our mouths need to be bridled... they need to be controlled.

Let me ask you:

- What kind of words do you presently use at home, at work, and with friends?
- Do your words put a smile or a frown on God’s face?
- Do they reflect Jesus?
- Do they support life and healing?
- Do they encourage and build up? or
- Do they cut, injure, and tear down?

Here’s a tip: Invite the Spirit of Jesus to bridle your mouth... controlling it so that your words will always be **candid**, **confidential**, **constructive** and **constrained** in your conversations with others.

With your mouth, build-up others... don’t tear them down!

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