



CAPITOL COMMISSION

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COLORADO

James 3:9-12 The Inconsistent Tongue

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Do we take our words seriously? Does James overstate the vicious nature of the tongue? No, for the tongue is restless to do evil and full of deadly poison and verbal venom that can destroy a life if we do not keep it in check. Given the sobering warning from Scripture regarding the propensity of our tongue towards such great evil, may we submit our tongue, which no man can tame, to the work and will of our Lord.

THE INCONSISTENT TONGUE - JAMES 3:9-12

“With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.” James 3:9-12

Not only can the tongue be a deadly poison that can destroy a life, but James makes it clear that the tongue can be tragically inconsistent and unstable. James identifies this inconsistency and then issues a stern warning by saying, “these things ought not to be this way.” You cannot be religious and profane at the same time.

A. BLESS AND CURSE? JAMES 3:9

“With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;” James 3:9

1. WITH IT WE BLESS OUR LORD + JAMES 3:9A

The greatest and highest use of our words should be to extol the praises of our Lord God. When James says “With it”, he is referring to the previous verses where the discussion is of course about the tongue. In general, “we” all as believers bless our Lord. What does it mean to bless?

Bless+Greek word **eulagoumen**,” means to praise, to speak well of, to extol, as directed towards God, His name, His acts.

So with our tongue, we extol the righteous virtues of the God we serve and are devoted to. Is this not the greatest way our tongue could be used?

2. AND WITH IT WE CURSE MEN + JAMES 3:9B

With this same tongue that we praise and bless our God, we also curse men, thus revealing the double nature of our tongue. Both words; “bless” and “curse” are in the present tense referring to an ongoing occurrence,

not just a one time event. The tongue can be religious and profane.

Curse” Greek word **katarometha**,” means to call down curses, to speak down or wish evil, condemn, to invoke evil on someone.

The picture James paints isn’t referring to profane speech. Rather, it is our angry, slanderous, insulting verbal abuse. Who is this verbal abuse directed towards? James says “we curse men”. This points to speech used when we are angry resulting in a loss of self control. We strike against others in malicious and harmful ways, wishing evil upon our fellow human beings of whom we are no better, no greater and of no higher importance. With the same tongue that we bless and praise our God; we also insult, slander and malign men. Whether in private or public, the sin is the same. Our tongue is a barometer of the heart. It reveals what is truly inside.

3. MADE IN THE LIKENESS OF GOD + JAMES 3:9C

James says that while professing faith in God (“with it we bless our Lord and Father”), we turn against the very ones created by God. Not only have all men been created by God, but we are all created in “the likeness of God.”

Likeness of God+Greek word **imago Deo**,” means to come into existence, a representation, a resemblance of God, here.

All of mankind has the divine likeness of God imparted to them. This verse echoes what is written in Genesis 1:26 where God created the first man and woman in His likeness, in His image. We are different than all His other creation. We are not an animal that has evolved over billions of years. We are people made after the likeness and image of the very God Himself. “The likeness of God” consists chiefly in the fact that man is personal, rational, moral being. Beyond all God’s other creatures, man possesses the attributes of reason, will and conscience, as well as moral and spiritual likeness.¹ We are His crowning creation! Colossians 1:16 refers to the fact that we were made by God and for God; to know Him and reflect His attributes. Romans 11:36 says, “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.” Yes, sin has marred our nature, and yet we were created by God in His likeness which gives His dignity to every individual. Therefore, to dishonor in any way,

¹Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg.201.

the one God has made, also dishonors God Himself. To curse, to slander, to malign any person is to curse, to slander and to malign God, whose likeness man still bears. James' point is this; how can our tongue offer praise to God, while at the same time hurl insults and verbal abuse with devastating effects against those who were created by the One we just praised? We cannot bless God and then curse man whom God made! Jesus said in Matthew 5:21 that anyone who is angry and calls another good for nothing, is worthless and doesn't deserve to live. Do we realize the seriousness of our insulting and hurtful words? God does.

B. THESE THINGS OUGHT NOT TO BE+ JAMES 3:10

"With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way." James 3:9-10

James places the emphasis in verse 10 on "the same mouth". How could blessing and cursing come from "the same mouth"? How can the speech of a believer be both good and evil? What began with the noble praise to God in verse nine turns into bitterness towards our brother who bears God's Own image. We are all guilty of this. 1 John 4:20 says, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God Whom he has not seen." It is not by coincidence that James interjects "My brethren", imploring fellow believers.

ought not+Greek word **οὐ**," meaning a strong, full negation, strongly negative, "**chre**," meaning congruity, in agreement, harmonious, compatible.

James gives serious admonishment to believers by strongly wording his statement that blessing God while at the same time cursing men is repugnant in God's sight. These things cannot be tolerated among believers. To profess to love God and yet revile men who are made in His image is unbecoming of any believer and an offense against God. Good and evil cannot be tolerated. We must resist the temptation to speak against others while claiming to love God and say with Job in Job 31:30: "No, I have not allowed my mouth to sin by asking for his life in a curse."

C. FRESH AND BITTER WATER - JAMES 3:11

"Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?" James 3:11

James begins with a rhetorical question where the answer calls for a strong negative reply of **no!** James will point out that there is a consistency in God's creation which in turn condemns the inconsistency of our tongue.

send out" Greek word **βρῦει**," refers to something that is full to bursting, gush or pour out.

Can a spring gush out both fresh, sweet water and bitter, salty water? The answer was obvious to all who lived in Palestine. A spring can only produce one type of water. It will either be good or bad, fresh or salty, sweet or bitter. It can't do both. Simply stated, if a spring flows with fresh water, it cannot produce bitter water. Our mouths are compared to springs. The desirable and useable water is fresh, sweet water! God created our tongue to burst forth with only one type of speech; that which brings honor to Him. Our tongue must conform to the purpose for which it was made. It cannot fluctuate between good and evil speech. Again, James makes his point clear from nature. We cannot speak praise to God and then gush out abusive language to our fellow man.

D. FIGS, OLIVES AND GRAPEVINES - JAMES 3:12

"With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh." James 3:9-12

Again James points to nature to draw spiritual lessons. Even plants produce only after their kind. It is impossible to produce figs and olives from a fig tree or grapes and figs from a grapevine. One plant cannot yield two different kinds of harvest. Plants produce according to their nature. It is obvious that James is calling for a resounding no to his second rhetorical question. Even nature is consistent with itself. And with this, James drives home his point that as a grapevine cannot produce olives, so a pure heart can't produce bitter speech, or so it shouldn't. This should be impossible!

James condemns man's inconsistent tongue leaving no room for excuses or argument with one final phrase from James 3:12b, "Nor can salt water produce fresh." Those who profess faith in God do not curse their brother. It is unthinkable and contradicts the very thing you say you believe.

James chapter three has charged the unchecked tongue with the power to hurt, destroy and change the course of one's life through reckless words, malicious rumors, false flattery and verbal venom while at the same time professing to love God. This is a shameful sin that cannot be tolerated. True faith will be demonstrated with a bridled tongue that possesses a wisdom that comes from above. If you think you are religious but have an unbridled tongue, your religion is vain and worthless. (James 1:26) For, true faith works in every aspect of your life.