

## Introduction

In our studies on James 3:1-8, we have been learning about Christians use of tongues. As a continuation of that theme, this study gives further instructions on how to use our tongues to glorify God. Thus, the main idea in this study is that the Christian use of the tongue out to be guided by integrity.

## The challenge of guiding our speech with integrity (James 3:9-10)

James 3:9-10 identifies some examples of how the tongue is often misused. This has to do with blessing God and cursing man who is made in the image of God.

It is possible that we can use our tongues either positively to bless the God or negatively to curse people. James describes using the tongue in either way at the same time as inconsistency. To James however, for those of us who are Christians, it should not be said that blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth.

On the one hand, using our tongue to bless means to praise or speak well of someone. Blessing God verbally through praise in song, prayer and witness illustrates our doctrinal orientation about who and what God is. On the other hand, to curse someone in the Bible is to express intentions for one's harm or destruction in an imprecatory manner. It contradicts speaking well or with good intention. The verbal sin of cursing an individual is to articulate hate and bitterness. Cursing demonstrates an innate desire to by-pass orientations towards grace. It desires and anticipates evil upon others "who have been made in the likeness of God."

## An Illustration on misusing the tongue (James 3:11-12)

James 3: 11-12 gives an example of an incongruity of such speech containing both blessings and cursing. To him a spring does not send forth both fresh and salt (bitter) water. And a fig tree does not bear olives, nor a grapevine bears figs. In the other words, the nature and condition of our hearts determine the kind of words that come out of our mouth. We are therefore called upon to guard our hearts concerning what we put into it through reading and hearing. Jesus offered a similar in instruction in Matthew 12:33-34.

## Jesus' Instruction in Matthew 12:33-37

It is important to observe that to Jesus what we say relates to what is stored up in our hearts. And that unreflected, misguided and thus empty words will be judged. Importantly, our justification or condemnation will also be determined by our words. In the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:33-37:

*33 "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. 35 A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. 36 But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."*

## The example of Peter

One of the Apostles whose use of tongue seems to demonstrate the possibility of using the tongue to bless the Lord and to offer curses was Peter. Using his tongue, Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). Yet in another instance, Peter denied Jesus with curses (John 18:15-27).

## Conclusion

This lesson has sought to challenge Christians to seek for an integrity in speech. Just as salt and fresh water are not to flow from the same source, likewise hurtful language should not come out of the same mouth that praises the Lord.

## Questions

1. Give some top five regrettable things you have said to other people and demonstrate how they are regrettable.
2. How can we avoid future regrets concerning the use of our tongues?
3. Are Christians allowed to curse others in prayers?
4. How does Jesus' instruction in Matthew 12:33-37 and James 3:9-12 agree?

**Psalm 107:1-9, 43**

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
**for his steadfast love endures forever.**

Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,  
those he redeemed from trouble  
and gathered in from the lands,  
**from the east and from the west,  
from the north and from the south.**

Some wandered in desert wastes,  
finding no way to an inhabited town;  
hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.  
**Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress;  
he led them by a straight way,  
until they reached an inhabited town.**

Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.  
For he satisfies the thirsty,  
and the hungry he fills with good things.  
**Let those who are wise give heed to these things,  
and consider the steadfast love of the LORD.**

**2019 BIBLE STUDY SERIES ON LOVING  
GOD**

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Text: James 3:9-12

**Developing integrity of speech**

28.04.2019

Memory Verse: James 3:10