

lifeLines guide  
**Homes Built on GRACE & TRUTH**  
**Who is man? Conflict Over Origin of Evil**

**WORD**

(You are welcome to gather in groups of 3 or 4 for all or part of this discussion.)

*"The good impulses within people are easily warped by cultures. Sick people are made by a sick culture."* -Abraham Maslow

*"I see members of the human species like members of other species, as essentially constructive in their fundamental nature, but damaged by their experience."*

*"I do not find that evil is inherent in human nature."*

*"My experience leads me to believe that it is cultural influences which are the major factor in our evil behaviors."* -Carl Rodgers

**Read James 3:1-12**

What is James' point here?

How do his examples (bits and horses, tongues, fresh water and bitter water and springs, fig trees and olives and grapevines, salt water and fresh water) help make his point?

How does what James is declaring here differ from Maslow and Rodgers?

Why is the distinction important for us to understand? Why is this an important conversation?

[MacLaren's Expositions](#)

James

**A WATCH ON THE DOOR OF THE LIPS**

[Jam 3:1-15](#)

Is it true, as James says, that it governs our actions as the bridle does the horse, Or the rudder the ship? No doubt, many sins go straight from the inner chambers of the heart's desires out into the world of action without going round by the way of speech; but still, if we think of the immense power of our own words and of others in setting our activities in motion, of the dreadful harvest of sin which has of ten sprung from one tempting word, of the ineffaceable traces of pollution which some vile book leaves in memory and heart, of the good and evil which have been wrought by spoken or printed words, and that never more truly than to-day, when a flood of talk all but drowns the world, we shall not think James exaggerating in the awful weight he gives to speech as the mother of action.

His other point is that this guiding power needs guidance. A firm yet gentle hand touches the rein, and the sensitive mouth yields to the light pressure. The steerman's hand pushes or draws the tiller an inch from or towards him, and the huge vessel yaws accordingly. Speech is often loose. Most men set less careful watch on the door of their lips than of their actions; but it would be wiser to watch the inner gate, which leads from thought to speech, than the outer one, which leads from speech to act. Idle words, rash words, unconsidered words, free-flowing words, make up much of our conversation. 'His tongue ran away with him' is too often true. It is hard but possible, and it is needful, to guide the helm, to keep a tight hand on the reins.

**...II. The next figure is that of the fire, suggested by the illustration of the small spark which sets a great forest ablaze.**

Drop a match or a spark from a locomotive or a pipe in the prairie grass, and we know what comes. The illustration was begun to carry on the contrast between the small member and its great results; but James catches fire, and goes off after the new suggestion, 'The tongue is a fire.'

Our space forbids discussing the interpretation of the difficult verse 6, but the general bearing of it is clear. It reiterates under a fresh figure the thought of the preceding verses as to the power of the tongue to set the whole body in motion. Only the imagery is more lurid, and suggests more fatal issues from an unhallowed tongue's influence. It 'defileth the whole body.' Foul speech, heard in schools or places of business, read in filthy books, heard in theatres, has polluted many a young life, and kindled fires which have destroyed a man, body and soul. Speech is like the axle which, when it gets heated, sets the wheel on fire. And what comes of the train then? And what set the axle ablaze? The sulphurous flames from the pit of Gehenna. No man who knows life, especially among young boys and young men, will think that James has lost the government of his tongue in speaking thus.

...Further, the assertion that 'salt water cannot yield sweet' implies that the 'cursing' destroys the reality of the verbal 'blessing God.' If a man says both, the imprecation is his genuine voice, and the other is mere wind.

The fountain is deeper than the tongue. From the heart are the issues of life. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and clear, pure waters will not well out thence unless the heart has been cleansed by Christ entering into it. Only when that tree of life is cast into the waters are they made sweet. When Christ governs us, we can govern our hearts and our lips, and through these our whole bodies and all their activities.

[Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary](#)

3:1-12 We are taught to dread an unruly tongue, as one of the greatest evils. The affairs of mankind are thrown into confusion by the tongues of men. Every age of

the world, and every condition of life, private or public, affords examples of this. Hell has more to do in promoting the fire of the tongue than men generally think; and whenever men's tongues are employed in sinful ways, they are set on fire of hell. No man can tame the tongue without Divine grace and assistance. The apostle does not represent it as impossible, but as extremely difficult. Other sins decay with age, this many times gets worse; we grow more forward and fretful, as natural strength decays, and the days come on in which we have no pleasure. When other sins are tamed and subdued by the infirmities of age, the spirit often grows more tart, nature being drawn down to the dregs, and the words used become more passionate. That man's tongue confutes itself, which at one time pretends to adore the perfections of God, and to refer all things to him; and at another time condemns even good men, if they do not use the same words and expressions. True religion will not admit of contradictions: how many sins would be prevented, if men would always be consistent! Pious and edifying language is the genuine produce of a sanctified heart; and none who understand Christianity, expect to hear curses, lies, boastings, and revilings from a true believer's mouth, any more than they look for the fruit of one tree from another. But facts prove that more professors succeed in bridling their senses and appetites, than in duly restraining their tongues. Then, depending on Divine grace, let us take heed to bless and curse not; and let us aim to be consistent in our words and actions.

### **Read Matthew 15:10-20**

What does Jesus have to say about this topic?

Why do you think the Pharisees were upset by what Jesus was teaching? What is at stake for them in this topic?

Any connection you are seeing with the modern-day conflict?

Who are the players today? What's at stake today?

### **[Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary](#)**

15:10-20 Christ shows that the defilement they ought to fear, was not from what entered their mouths as food, but from what came out of their mouths, which showed the wickedness of their hearts. Nothing will last in the soul but the regenerating graces of the Holy Spirit; and nothing should be admitted into the church but what is from above; therefore, whoever is offended by a plain, seasonable declaration of the truth, we should not be troubled at it. The disciples ask to be better taught as to this matter. Where a weak head doubts concerning any word of Christ, an upright heart and a willing mind seek for instruction. It is the heart that is desperately wicked, Jer 17:9, for there is no sin in word or deed, which was not first in the heart. They all come out of the man, and are fruits of that wickedness which is in the heart, and is wrought there. When Christ teaches, he will show men the deceitfulness and wickedness of their own hearts; he will teach them to humble themselves, and to seek to be cleansed in the Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness.

### Thoughts from Pastor Jeff

Those who would suggest that the source of evil is found in institutions or culture or experience, first of all, fail to recognize that those very same entities are governed by men and women with all of their short-sightedness and frailties. And, secondly, that viewpoint props them up and their particular brand of institution, culture or experience to be the savior. We see this in politics, church, and platforms of every kind in our modern-day context. This is why the Pharisees were troubled. This is why people from every segment of society today are troubled. If they lose this fundamental argument, they lose their solution and they are left with nothing.

### **PRAY**

Pray Psalm 32 : 1-5

### **LOVE**

Knowing that the people in your circle of influence are in the middle of this conflict over the origin of evil, how can you love them, serve them, and help them see the truth and grace inherent in this topic?

