

## Authentic Christians Control What They Say

Message 2 of 6 in the series: "Authentic: Life Lessons from the Book of James"

### A. James, an early Christian leader, wrote an open letter instructing believers how to authentically live out their faith while living among unbelievers.

"This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am writing to the 'twelve tribes'—**Jewish believers scattered abroad**. Greetings!" James 1:1 (NLT)

1. The recipients of James' letter were living among unbelievers because they had been driven out of Jerusalem and scattered by intense religious persecution. "But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison. **But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went.**" Acts 8:3-4 (NLT)
2. Providentially, persecution caused the Good News of Christ to be spread everywhere. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. **And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**" Acts 1:8 (NLT)

**Life Application:** "And we know that **God causes everything to work together for the good** of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." Romans 8:28 (NLT)

**Life Application:** We need to be careful about how we live out our faith among unbelievers. "**Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors.** Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world." 1 Peter 2:12 (NLT)

### B. James said that if we don't learn to control our tongues, no one will take our faith in Christ seriously.

"If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and **your religion is worthless.**" James 1:26 (NLT)

1. Apparently, lots of people with all kinds of motivations were eager to teach in the churches formed by scattered believers so James warned them that teaching God's Word is serious business. "Dear brothers and sisters, **not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly.**" James 3:1 (NLT)

"But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will bring sudden destruction on themselves. **Many will follow** their evil teaching and shameful immorality. **And because of these teachers, the way of truth will be slandered.**" 2 Peter 2:1-2 (NLT)

"But I tell you that **everyone will have to give account** on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken." Matthew 12:36 (NIV)

**Life Application:** We should pray for our pastors, teachers, staff, and connect group leaders. "And pray for me, too. **Ask God to give me the right words** so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike." Ephesians 6:19 (NLT)

2. Our tongues are very powerful and can cause incredible damage when we don't control them. "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." James 3:2-6 (NLT)

"A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends." Proverbs 16:28 (NLT)

"With their mouths the godless destroy their neighbors..." Proverbs 11:9a (NIV)

"Gentle words are a tree of life; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit." Proverbs 15:4 (NLT)

"**The tongue can bring death or life;** those who love to talk will reap the consequences."

Proverbs 18:21 (NLT)

3. We can't control our tongues through our own willpower. "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." James 3:7-8 (NLT)

*Note:* A tongue problem is really a heart problem. "...**whatever is in your heart determines what you say**. A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart." Matthew 12:34b-35 (NLT)

**Good News!** We can gain control over our tongues through the power of the Holy Spirit. "And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. **I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart**. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations." Ezekiel 36:26-27 (NLT) "For God is working in you, **giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him**." Philippians 2:13 (NLT)

4. Out of control tongues are capable of breath-taking religious hypocrisy. "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." James 3:9-12 (NLT)

**Life Application:** When God convicts us of sinning with our tongues, we need to repent and surrender control of our tongues to the Holy Spirit. "**So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives**. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions... But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... **Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives**." Galatians 5:16-17, 22-23a, & 25 (NLT)

### C. Three tongue issues we may need God's help with right now:

1. Listening before speaking - "Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires." James 1:19-20 (NLT)
2. Over-committing - "It is better to say nothing than to make a promise and not keep it. Don't let your mouth make you sin." Ecclesiastes 5:5-6a (NLT)
3. Filthy speech - "Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God." Ephesians 5:4 (NLT)

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### Connect Group Discussion Questions:

1. How did a violent outbreak of religious persecution against Christians in Jerusalem providentially cause the Good News about Jesus to be spread everywhere? (Acts 1:8 & 8:1-4, Romans 8:28)
2. Read James 1:26 & 1 Peter 2:12. Why do you think James said that an out-of-control tongue will destroy our Christian witness? Have you ever seen a believer's faith mocked because of something he/she said online?
3. Read James 3:1, Matthew 12:36, & 2 Peter 2:1-3. Why should we pray for our pastors/teachers/connect group leaders? (Ephesians 6:19)
4. Why can't we just make up our minds to never sin again with our tongues? (James 3:2-8, Matthew 12:34-35, Jeremiah 17:9)
5. How does the Holy Spirit help us gain control over our tongues? (Ezekiel 36:26-27, Galatians 5:16-25, Romans 8:2)
6. Discuss the following verses regarding the tongue: Proverbs 11:9, 15:4, 16:28, 18:21, 26:18-19, 27:10; & Ecclesiastes 10:20. Why do you think there are so many proverbs about our tongues in the Bible?
7. In which of the following areas do you need God's help right now?
  - Listening before speaking (James 1:19-20)
  - Over-committing (Ecclesiastes 5:5-6)
  - Filthy speech (Ephesians 5:4)