

“The Tongue That Blesses and Curses”

July 29, 2012

Text: James 3:9-12

This morning’s text is about people who bless God, but curse men.

In James’ discussion of the tongue’s power, he has now come to this very strange/contradictory anomaly=>

- * speaking love/adoration/blessing to God,
- * speaking hatred/disdain/cursing to man.

Using one’s power of speech to bless the Lord, is the noblest, loftiest use of this faculty, that is possible for men/angels.

There are extraordinary/high-ranking angels in heaven called Seraphim hovering around God’s throne whose fulltime job seems to involve blessing God, calling out to one another=> *“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory”* (Isa 6:3).

I don’t know whether they ever leave heaven and come to earth.

But it’s clear that the 1 thing about earth they like to talk about is that it is full of God’s glory.

Someone: I can think of a lot more important things to which angels could devote their time/energy/power, than that.

Ans: There is nothing more important in all of creation any man/angel could ever do, than to bless his Creator’s name.

More to the point, there is nothing more important that *you* or *I* will ever do, than bless our Creator's name.

The natural reaction to feeling assured that God has truly saved your soul, and that His smile now rests upon you, is to bless/praise Him.

If you are fully persuaded that He loves you, & has redeemed you, & if you really understand the eternal implications of that, you'll respond as Paul did=> "***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who *has blessed* us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ***" (Eph 1:3).

On the other hand, if you're not so sure about what God's Word teaches, or have doubts that it actually applies to you personally, it wouldn't be surprising if you didn't feel like praising Him.

No one can get excited about the wonderful promises in Scripture that he's not really confident are for him. If it's only possible that they belong to you, perhaps you should feel grateful for them—but then again, perhaps not.

For the person who is fully assured that he's born again and has been adopted by God, as his loving/protective Father, blessing the Lord comes naturally.

He delights in the confidence that Jesus has truly brought these enormously significant benefits/gifts/joys into his life. Not only are they absolutely essential to his very being;

God has given them to him w/ unstinting
abundance/generosity.

The Lord hasn't merely spared his soul from hell, saving him
from it by the skin of his teeth;

He has welcomed him home like the Prodigal Son, placed a
robe on his back, set a ring on his finger, & rejoiced
w/ the angels over this wonderful turn of events in his
life.

The Father says to him, as a member of His household=>
“Help yourself to whatever you like. I’ve bequeathed
to you the whole estate of My own spiritual wealth.
Take of it freely & you will glorify Me by your doing
so.”

God's own righteousness has now been imputed to him,
and God's mercy/grace have been lavished upon him.

Realizing that God, in his love, has held back no good thing,
sparing no expense for him, he can shout gleefully with
David=> “***Bless the LORD, O my***
soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name”
(Psa 103:1).

**An enlightened believer can feel grateful for God's temporal
blessings, but much more so, for His spiritual/eternal
blessings.**

The blessings that belong to this world alone are not definite
marks of the Lord's elective favor.

He causes His sun to rise on both the-evil/the-good, &
sends rain on the unrighteous a/w/a the righteous
(Mt 5:45).

In this life, Lazarus just survived on crumbs from the rich
man's table, while the unbelieving rich man himself
lived the high life in his mansion.

Not until the angels carried Lazarus away to Abraham's
bosom, was he comforted (Lk 16:20-22).

We thank God for our temporal blessings, but it is His spiritual
blessings that really fill our hearts w/ gratitude/praise.
These are the most priceless/enduring blessings of all.
They include a new heart, a new hope, a new love, & a new
life.

They also include God's invaluable gifts of regeneration,
justification, adoption, sanctification, & glorification.

And best of all, they include the indescribably
precious/gracious gift of His own Son, as our
Savior/Redeemer.

This is the treasure-chest of precious things that make up
the believer's eternal/rightful inheritance, from God,
his Father.

Any Xn who continually reminds himself of the blessings that are
his because of God's gracious dealings w/ him, finds it easy
and natural to bless his Heavenly Father in return.

- * His tongue has been made holy by God's election, and by the Spirit's regeneration.
- * His heart has been made holy by X's redemption, in which old things have passed away & new things have come into being, and his whole inner man has been consecrated and set-apart unto his beloved Lord.
- * So the reaction of his heart, expressed in words from his lips, should be holy as well.

But ironically, some Xns mistakenly assume that the believer's spiritual freedom allows them to speak very unholy/hateful words.

James' whole point in today's text is that this ought never to happen in any Xn's life.

The tongue that blesses God, should never curse men.

James presents a 3 point argument that the mouth which blesses God should not curse men...

*** Point 1—The Issue**

[James 3:9]=> *“With it [the tongue (verse 8)] we **ble**ss our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;”*

There's an important we need to answer at the outset=> Who is James including among the “we” who are doing this?

Some commentators say that it refers to both Xns/non-Xns.

Others argue that it refers only to non-Xns because a true Xn wouldn't commit such a heinous sin as cursing other people.

But calling those to whom James is referring anything but Xns runs into several problems.

* 1st, his use of “*we*” seems to refer to Xns=> “*We bless our Lord.*”

* 2nd, he also speaks of “*our* [his/their] *Lord and Father.*”

A non-Xn couldn’t rightfully consider God his Father and wouldn’t want Him as his Lord.

* 3rd, in verses 10 & 12, James includes these people among “*my brethren*”—a term of endearment usually reserved for believers.

So James is presenting an issue that ought not to exist among God’s people, but unfortunately can/does, if they are walking in the flesh rather than the Spirit.

He is confronting Xns who are guilty of gross duplicity, and the pres. tense verbs indicate that their guilt on this score is ongoing.

In laying out this issue, James first says, “*we bless our Lord.*”

“*Bless*” (*eulogeo*) means that we speak well of God, or praise Him.

The person in question here recognizes God as his sovereign “*Lord*” who deserves his obedience;
And as his own loving/compassionate “*Father,*” who deserves his honor/praise/trust.

He truly believes God has adopted him as one of His children and that he is a partaker of the Father's divine nature through spiritual regeneration

(II Pet 1:4).

He blesses God's name, thinking of Him in this light.

The blessing of God that proceeds from his mouth might take a variety of different forms=>

* E.g. he might say it in a statement/prayer of gratitude for God's acts of benevolence on his behalf, in his life, ascribing glory to His name, directly.

* It might be his simple expression of assent when someone else praises God for His goodness=>

E.g. a fellow Xn might bless God in a statement he makes or in a prayer for the food he's about to eat, and the believer w/ a double tongue might then add his own "Amen" at the end.

* It might be his assent to biblical statements of praise that he hears=>

* E.g. someone might read Moses words, "*From everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God*" (Psa 90:2); To which Mr. Double-tongue adds "Amen!"

* John writes, "*God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all*" (I Jn 1:5); Again, he responds, "Amen!"

* David says, "*The LORD is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works*" (Psa 145:9); "Amen! (so be it, I agree)"

So the person who blesses God w/ whom James is concerned,
does so verbally, either by his own independent expressions
of praise, or by assent/agreement to other people's praise,
whether another Xn, or a writer of Scripture.

**It may be that the person involved, is praising God's name
thoughtlessly—in a rote repetition of words.**

E.g. pious Jews in James' day habitually said the words,
“Blessed be God,” or “Blessed be the name,”
whenever the Lord was spoken of.

In the liturgies of formal churches today, a priest still
reads a series of blessings to God, and the
people respond by saying, “Amen.”

In our own case, we may sing hymns of praise to God in
church;

And then speak hateful words the next day to/about
other people, w/o giving any thought to the
bizarre/glaring inconsistency between the two,
in our own speech.

On the other hand, the person may ignorantly think he has the
freedom to praise God's name in one breath, then turn right
around and curse other people, in the next.

He would be blind to his own hypocrisy in doing so.

**The little phrase in verse 9 “*with it*” before both “*we bless the
Lord*” and “*we curse men*” underscores the tension of
this enigma.**

They place the most evil use of the tongue conceivable,
alongside its most noble use, highlighting the issue
James is concerned with and it confronting.

James views it as unthinkable that such wonderful & such
horrible statements should come from the same mouth.

**“To curse” means to wish-for, or even pray-for, someone’s
misfortune out of a spirit of malevolence.**

It may actually involve a desire to use God’s own power
against someone viewed as a enemy.

It is the opposite of what Jesus commanded us to do, in
dealing with our enemies=> *“Love your **enemies**, do
good to those who hate you, / **ble**ss those who **cur**se
you, **pray** for those who mistreat you” (Lk 6:27-28).*

The most obvious/poignant example of cursing someone would
be to say to him directly some horrible statement, calling
for him to be damned in hell for all eternity (some version
of “May God damn you).”

But cursing men could prob. also extend to actually praying
that God would afflict/destroy them in this life.

Either way, a curse is an outward expression in inward
anger/hatred.

Jesus considered it a verbal form of murder, & so He said:

*“You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU
SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' & 'Whoever
commits murder shall be liable to the court.' / But I
say to you that everyone who is **angry** with his
brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever*

shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell"
(Mt 5:21-22).

Be very careful what you say when you're angry at someone.

That's why David said=> *"I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle, while the wicked are in my presence"*
(Psa 39:1).

Cursing might even include any critical/hurtful remark against another person, motivated by a hateful desire to cause someone else to think less of him, or ill of him.

The speaker in such a case usually measures his words very carefully, probing (in a calculated way) his listener, to determine just how much damage he dares to do, and can do w/o fully revealing the depth/fury of the sinful, loathsome, despicable hatred in his own heart.

In James 1:26, James said=> *"If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not **bridle his tongue** but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless."*

The man whose mouth blesses God & curses men thinks himself to be religious, but his religion is totally worthless.

He doesn't fulfill the royal law of love towards his neighbors, God finds his words of worship/praise worthless/unacceptable/repugnant, and he should not expect God's blessings in answer to his prayers.

James also points out that the central issue in all this is that his curses are directed at men made in God's likeness.

That likeness was imparted to Adam at the time of his creation.

It has been marred by sin, but it still exists in its
dignity/essence, in every human being, from the
moment of conception.

God's image in man is seen in certain qualities which man
shares with God, including a nature that is rational,
moral, intelligent, emotional, and volitional.

When a Xn's flesh takes control of his heart, he views those
against whom he bears a grudge and has postured himself,
as enemies upon whom he wants to take revenge.

* James says to view them as people made in God's image.

* Jesus said to view them as people for whom we are to
pray, that God will bless them.

**The 1st half of verse 10 is a brief statement of the utter
absurdity/incongruity of a Xn's mouth being used to
curse others.**

[Verse 10a]=> *"from the same mouth come both blessing and
cursing."*

You can almost hear astonishment/dismay in James' voice.
No one can acceptably bless God while harboring hatred towards
other people, expressing that hatred w/ his mouth.

God's image in their human nature is profaned by that,
even as he expresses his love for God.

1 John 4:20=> *"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's wrong for a man to speak well of God, & to malign his brother.

Titus 3 says it very simply=> *“Malign no one”* (Titus 3:2).

It should never happen, and the Xn who does it, is actively disobeying the Lord, and His Word.

He is walking in the flesh, not the Spirit.

He is displeasing his Savior/God.

Instead of God's blessing on his life, he should expect

God's loving discipline/correction, because=>

*“WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES,
AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE
RECEIVES”* (Heb 12:6).

James is describing a Xn brother who has hit rock bottom

**spiritually=> cursing/hating people his Savior loves and
has commanded him to love/bless/pray-for.**

He is treating them disdainfully, and wishing that God would do them harm, rather than good.

There is no loving-tenderness in his heart towards these people he considers his enemies/opponents;

Only the hard lovelessness, of his fleshly nature.

This is a very tragic picture, which, unfortunately, is all too common at times, among those who call themselves Xns.

And their hypocrisy is topped off, as they sing their praises to God, and bless His name in prayer.

I use the words “they”/“their.”

In reality, I should use the words James uses—“we”/“our.”

The terrible truth is that every one of us has been guilty of
this kind of sin, at one time or another.

And lest anyone think I don’t include myself in that
statement, I assure you, I do.

And that, brothers/sisters, is the issue, that James calls us to deal
with in this text.

*** Point 2—The Injunction**

[Vs 10b]—“My brethren, these things *ought not* to be this way.”
Isn’t that a wonderfully gentle/tactful/benign way to put it?

James delivers this rebuke to his Xn brothers w/ tender affection.

He could have said, “You spiritual low-lives! How dare you
defile God’s holiness by blessing Him out of one side of
your hypocritical mouths, & cursing men out of the other?”

But instead, James restrains himself & gently/loving says
simply=> “*These things ought not to be this way.*”

**We know that what James means is, they *really* ought not to
be this way!**

There should be no place whatever in a Xn’s life for hypocritical
speech of this kind.

His life should be a showcase of sincerity, in which his

“Yes” really means yes, & his “No” means no.

It should also be a living example to the world of X’s love.

And it should preclude any tolerance of the spirit of
revenge, knowing that the way we judge others, is the

standard by which X will measure out judgment to us
(Mt 7:2).

But James knows that, if the people who read these words of his
are truly Xns, the H.S. will convict their hearts.

James himself doesn't need to do that, & it's not his to do.
So if you are feeling a bit convicted about this issue right now,
praise God—you're spiritually alive.

That's a good indication the H.S. is at work in your heart,
because you are among those whom He has indwelt.

If He weren't there, it wouldn't bother you much.

But you must respond to that sense of conviction w/
repentance/confession.

Repent of it as sin, and confess it to Jesus X, because those
who do so, are the only ones He forgives/cleanses
(1 Jn 1:9).

*** Point 3—The Illustrations**

**Perhaps you weren't among those who felt convicted by
James' words.**

If not, it may be that the explanation for your allowing both
blessing/cursing to proceed from your mouth, is not merely
that you are a Xn who is walking in the flesh.

There's another possibility, which James will suggest in
verses 11-12, with 3 illustrations.

And again, he will do so very gently/politely, allowing the
Spirit to do His own convicting work in your heart.

[Verse 11]=> “*Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?*” (implied answer: No way!).

This illustration of a fountain is the 1st of 3 illustrations James will offer.

There actually are salt-water springs located in the Dead Sea area.

In Jerusalem and in areas where the churches were located to which James was writing, there are only fresh water springs.

But none of these springs produce both fresh/salt water.

Such a phenomenon would be physically impossible.

James’ point is that a tongue which speaks sweet words of praise to God & bitter words of hatred to men is just as impossible, indicating a fundamental contradiction of nature/character.

Now James adds 2 more illustrations to nail down his point.

[Verse 12]=> “*Can a **fig tree**, my brethren, produce **olives**, or a **vine** produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh.*”

It is impossible for fig trees to produce olives, for grape vines to produce figs, or for salt water to produce fresh water.

Each type of tree will produce according to its own nature, and nature is never inconsistent with itself, each part of it doing exactly/only what God created it to do.

In the same way, there are spiritual laws that apply to man, which are just as fixed as the genetic laws that govern the nature of trees and their fruit.

One of those laws is that like begets like, so evil speech only comes from evil hearts.

James is so tactful here that he doesn't explicitly state his conclusion, but it's obvious what he is implying=>

If a supposed Xn finds himself constantly being caught up in evil speech, and the hypocrisy of both blessing God and cursing men, the problem may be far more serious/fundamental than fleshliness;

He may not actually be born again.

Jesus said the same thing, but was more direct about it=>

"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? / Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. / A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. / Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. / So then, you will know them by their fruits. / Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven [based on his life's fruit]" (Mt 7:16-21).

James again addresses all his readers as "my brethren."

He isn't willing to directly accuse them of not being Xns.

But he provides illustrations by which the conclusion is

inevitable, that a mouth which curses, speaks for an unregenerate heart.

We know a person by the kind of fruit his life produces.

Unless the H.S. has regenerated a person, he is not born again, & his life cannot produce spiritual fruit, any more than fig tree can produce olives.

* You can call a fig tree an olive tree, but that doesn't make it one.

And you can call a non-Xn a Xn, even persuading him that he is a Xn, but that won't make him one because it won't change his nature.

He is still a child of God's wrath.

* You can trim a fig tree & its leaves all you want to make it look more like an olive tree, but if it still produces any fruit at all after you're through with it, it certainly won't be olives. In the same way, you can try to shape up a child so that he looks like a Xn.

But if he hasn't, by God's grace, undergone the spiritual miracle of regeneration in which old things pass away & new things come, he will produce no real spiritual fruit despite all your training/trimming/shaping.

He won't, because by nature he can't.

There must be a deeper/more-enduring work in his heart.

* And you can surround a fig tree with olive trees, hoping that the association will cause it to produce olives; but it won't.

In the same way, an unconverted man will not necessarily be saved merely by going to church & spending time w/ Xns.

But if he believes on the Lord Jesus X, he will be saved, his heart will be transformed, and he will bless the Lord from a sincere faith that pleases the heart of God.

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1. Using one’s power of speech to bless the Lord is the noblest, loftiest use of this faculty that is possible for [8 men] or angels.

Isa 6:3; Eph 1:3

2. For the person who is fully assured that he’s born again and has been adopted by God as his loving, protective Father, [18 blessing] the Lord comes naturally.

Psa 103:1; Mt 5:45; Lk 16:20-22

3. We thank God for our temporal blessings, but it is His spiritual blessings that really fill our hearts with gratitude and [14 praise].

4. Ironically, some Christians mistakenly assume that the believer’s spiritual freedom allows them to speak very unholy, [16 hateful] words.

James presents a three point argument that the mouth which blesses God should not curse men...

*** Point 1—The Issue**

[James 3:9]

5. James is presenting an issue that ought not to exist among God’s people, but can and does if they are walking in the [12 flesh].

II Pet 1:4; Psa 90:2; I Jn 1:5; Psa 145:9

6. It may be that the person involved is praising God’s name thoughtlessly—in a [10 rote] repetition of words.

7. “*To curse*” means to wish for (or even pray for) someone’s [24 misfortune] out of a spirit of malevolence.

Lk 6:27-28; Mt 5:21-22; Jms 1:26

8. The central issue in all this is that his curses are directed at men made in [12 God’s] likeness.

[Verse 10a]

9. No one can acceptably bless God while harboring hatred towards other people, expressing that hatred with his [12 mouth].

I Jn 4:20; Titus 3:2; Heb 12:6

10. This is a very tragic picture, which, unfortunately, is all too [14 common] at times among those who call themselves Christians.

*** Point 2—The Injunction**

[Vs 10b]

11. There should be no place in a Christian's life for [26 hypocritical] speech.
Mt 7:2; I Jn 1:9

*** Point 3—The Illustration**

[Verse 11]

12. James' point is that a tongue which speaks sweet words of praise to God and bitter words of hatred to men is a fundamental contradiction of [14 nature] and character.

[Verse 12]

13. If a supposed Christian finds himself constantly being caught up in the hypocrisy of both blessing God and cursing men, he may not actually be [10 born] again.

Mt 7:16-21

14. An unconverted man will not be saved by going to church; but if he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, he will be saved, his heart will be transformed, and he will [12 bless] the Lord from a sincere faith.