

**TAMING THE TONGUE.**  
**James 3:1-12**

In his Farewell Address to A.A., Dr. Bob said:

Let us also remember to guard that erring member the tongue, and if we must use it, let's use it with kindness and consideration and tolerance (*DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers*, p. 338). Anne Smith, the wife of Dr. Bob, made similar comments in the spiritual journal she kept and shared with early AA's and their families.

As we study James 3, you will see Dr. Bob's idea of the necessity for kindness, consideration and tolerance in our speech and actions. You find these principles throughout the Big Book (4<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 67, 69-70, 83-84, 97, 118, 125, 135).

A major portion of James chapter 3 is devoted to the trouble that can be caused by an untamed tongue. Let's examine this passage.

**James 3:1 (NIV)**

Not many of you should presume [and rush] to be teachers [in the church which is a highly responsible work], my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly [and we will be held to higher and stricter standards]. ... (2) We all stumble in many ways [when we say the wrong things by opening our mouths and we offend others with our words]. If anyone is never at fault in what he says [that is, he never makes any mistakes when he speaks and he always controls his tongue], he is a perfect man [like Pastor Gene who is a full mature man], able to keep his whole body in check [because he controls himself in every other way]. ... (3) When we put bits into the mouths of [large] horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal [in any direction we want and we have that animal under our control]. ... (4) Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered [and directed] by a very small rudder wherever the pilot [and captain] wants to go. ... (5) Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts [when it brags about doing important things and it makes grand speeches and it can do enormous damage]. Consider [and think about] how a great forest is set on fire by a small spark [and a little flame]. ... (6) The tongue also is a fire [and it is as dangerous as any fire and it is], a world of evil among the parts of the body [that is the tongue has an evil power and our words can turn harmony to chaos and throw mud on a reputations]. It corrupts [by spreading evil thoughts and poisons] the whole person [that is every part of his life and], sets the whole course of his life on fire [which brings destruction and disaster], and is itself set on fire by [the flames of] hell. ... (7) All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ... (8) but no man can tame the tongue [when it gets out of control]. It is a restless evil [it is uncontrollable and undisciplined and it will not keep still and it runs wild and it is], full of deadly [and death-bringing] poison. ... (9) With the tongue we praise [and give thanks to] our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ... (10) Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this [sort of thing] should not be [because this is not right and can't go on]. ... (11) Can both fresh [and clean] water and salt [and polluted or dirty] water flow [at the same time] from the same spring? ... (12) My brothers, can a fig tree bear [or produce] olives, or [can] a grapevine bear [or produce] figs? [No and] neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

1. If you could hear a tape recording of everything you said last week, what would you want to edit out?

2. How do you react when you hear someone cursing and using abusive language?
3. How can a person be hurt by the words of others?

BB, pg# 66-67 - We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick too. We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves, "This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done." We avoid retaliation or argument. We wouldn't treat sick people that way. If we do, we destroy our chance of being helpful. We cannot be helpful to all people, but at least God will show us how to take a kindly and tolerant view of each and every one.

4. What can you learn about a person by listening to him or her speak?
5. What unique responsibility does a teacher bear? (3:1)
6. How is a teacher in the church supposed to be different from the average member?
7. If a person were never at fault in what he or she said, what would that show about the person? (3:2)
8. What is significant about the way we talk? (3:2)
9. What are the ways we sin with our speech?

BB, pg# 70 - If we have been thorough about our personal inventory, we have written down a lot. We have listed and analyzed our resentments. We have begun to comprehend their futility and their fatality. We have commenced to see their terrible destructiveness. We have begun to learn tolerance, patience and good will toward all men, even our enemies, for we look on them as sick people. We have listed the people we have hurt by our conduct, and are willing to straighten out the past if we can. In this book you read again and again that faith did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

10. Why are sins of speech often overlooked as not serious?
11. What is the purpose of a bit in the mouth of a horse? (3:3)
12. What is the purpose of the rudder of a ship? (3:4)
13. What damage can a small spark cause to a great forest? (3:4)

BB, pg# 84-85 - Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help. Love and tolerance of others is our code. And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone, even alcohol. For by this time sanity will have returned.

14. What similarity does a person's tongue have to a horse's bit, a ship's rudder, and a spark of fire? (3:5)
15. How is our speech influenced by others around us?
16. How did James describe the tongue? (3:6-8)
17. What damage do our tongues do to us? (3:6)
18. What is so difficult about taming the tongue? (3:7-8)
19. What practical advice would you give someone who wanted to control his or her tongue better?

BB, pg# 118 - You and your husband will find that you can dispose of serious problems easier than you can the trivial ones. Next time you and he have a heated discussion, no matter what the subject, it should be the privilege of either to smile and say, "This is getting serious. I'm sorry I got disturbed. Let's talk about it later." If your husband is trying to live on a spiritual basis, he will also be doing everything in his power to avoid disagreement or contention.

20. Of what inconsistencies are we capable? (3:9-10)
21. What weaknesses in our lives does our speech often expose?
22. In what ways are we inconsistent? (3:9-10)

23. In what times or places can your tongue be used for good?
24. How can you change your daily speech to reflect its importance in your life?

BB, pg# 125 - We families of Alcoholics Anonymous keep few skeletons in the closet. Everyone knows about the others' alcoholic troubles. This is a condition which, in ordinary life, would produce untold grief; there might be scandalous gossip, laughter at the expense of other people, and a tendency to take advantage of intimate information. Among us, these are rare occurrences. We do talk about each other a great deal, but we almost invariably temper such talk by a spirit of love and tolerance. Another principle we observe carefully is that we do not relate intimate experiences of another person unless we are sure he would approve. We find it better, when possible, to stick to our own stories. A man may criticize to laugh at himself and it will affect others favorably, but criticism or ridicule coming from another often produce the contrary effect. Members of a family should watch such matters carefully, for one careless, inconsiderate remark has been known to raise the very devil. We alcoholics are sensitive people. It takes some of us a long time to outgrow that serious handicap.

25. What illustrations from nature did James use to condemn cursing? (3:11-12)
26. What can a spring or a fruit tree teach us about speech? (3:11-12)
27. What motivates a person to teach others?
28. What do you need to remove from your speech habits this week to make your words more pleasing to God?
29. What positive words do your family and coworkers need to hear from your mouth this week?

BB, pg# 135 - One of our friends is a heavy smoker and coffee drinker. There was no doubt he over- indulged. Seeing this, and meaning to be helpful, his wife commenced to admonish him about it. He admitted he was overdosing these things, but frankly said that he was not ready to stop. His wife is one of those persons who really feels there is something rather sinful about these commodities, so she nagged, and her intolerance finally threw him into a fit of anger. He got drunk. Of course our friend was wrong -- dead wrong. He had to painfully admit that and mend his spiritual fences. Though he is now a most effective member of Alcoholics Anonymous, he still smokes and drinks coffee, but neither his wife nor anyone else stands in judgment. She sees she was wrong to make a burning issue out of such a matter when his more serious ailments were being rapidly cured.