

Excessive Use of the Mandible

James 3:3-12

The Book of James #6

When there are many words, transgression is not lacking. But whoever restrains his tongue is prudent. Therefore, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord. My rock and my redeemer.

I don't remember a lot about the year I toiled and labored as a third grader in Mrs. Grant's Class. But I do remember this: Dem Bones. Dem Bones. Dem Dancing Bones. Doing the Skeleton Dance. The foot bone's connected to the leg bone. The leg bone's connected to the knee bone. The knee bone's connected to the thigh bone. Doing the skeleton dance. The thigh bone's connected to the hip bone. The hip bone's connected to backbone. The backbone's connected to the neck bone. Dem Bones. Dem Bones. Them Dancing Bones. Doing the skeleton dance. I don't remember a lot about the year I toiled and labored as an eighth grader in Mrs. Middleton's Science Class. But I do remember this: We have between 206 to 213 bones in our bodies, depending on how we count the sternum. The biggest is the femur; the smallest is the stapes bone, located right smack dab in the middle of your ear. But the most interesting thing about your skeletal system is this: nearly all of the 200+ bones in your body are incapable of isolated movement. To move the phalanges in your toes, you have to move the metatarsals. If you lift your femur up, your tibia goes with it. That's how we do the skeleton dance.

But, church, I don't want to speak to you today about femur or the tibia. Instead, I want to talk to you about the one bone in our body that is perfectly capable of isolated movement, independent of any other bone. And, friend, it sure seems to know it because we exercise it an awful lot! It's the mandible: the only bone in our bodies capable of motoring at 1000 rpms per second while the rest of our bones are perfectly at rest. And it's no coincidence that the only bone in our body capable of isolated movement also has a close cousin. He so happens to be strongest muscle in the body that's also capable of isolated movement. His name is Mr. Tongue. According to Jesus' brother, James, life and death are literally in the power of this mandible and tongue combination. That means that the mandible and tongue have the capacity to bring death. Or they have the capacity to bring death. Not both. It also implies that we have a choice to make each and every day: excessive use of the mandible in a way that brings death of the spirit. Or tamed use of them that brings life of the spirit. My question to you today then, church, is this: how are you using your mandible: excessively or bridled by Jesus? Turn with me to James 3:3-12 as we examine this powerful passage together.

³ *When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.* ⁴ *Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.* ⁵ *Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.* ⁶ *The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.* ⁷ *All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind,* ⁸ *but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.* ⁹ *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness.* ¹⁰ *Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.* ¹¹ *Can both fresh water and saltwater flow from the same spring?* ¹² *My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olive, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*

Signs of Excessive Use of the Mandible

1. Used as a rudder from a careless boat pilot

- **Oh They Built the Ship Titanic – (1)** Oh they built the ship Titanic. To sail the ocean blue. For they thought it was a ship. That water would never go through. But it was on its maiden trip. That an iceberg hit the ship. And it was sad sad sad when that ship went down. **(2)** the Titanic sank because the rudder was too small and it couldn't turn fast enough. But the captain of the Titanic, Edward Smith, headed towards danger anyway.
- **Main Idea of the Point** – The tongue is the rudder of the soul and spirit. When used carelessly, it leads to icebergs and sinking ships.
- **Main Textual Discussion** – (1) James compares the tongue to a horse bit in a way you expect him to explain. He doesn't because horse bits actually work to tame the animal. (2) He moves directly to the more serious comparison of a ship with a rudder. (3) And unfortunately, it isn't a rudder that steers to good directions. (4) It likes to make great boasts that lead straight to ice bergs and sinking ships.
- **App** – The mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart. So be careful with your words. The mouth also tends to project direction. So use your words wisely.

2. Used as a lit match from a careless camper

- **From the Perspective of a California Firefighter – (1)** I met a fella the other day at the grocery store who just moved here from California. **(2)** So like a fool, I asked him: "what brings you to Florida?" **(3)** His answer: I don't like fighting wildfires. **(4)** Turns out he was a Firefighter from California who fought the blazes. **(5)** His response when I asked him how those fires start: Lit matches by careless campers start wildfires when the powers that be put moratoriums on controlled burns.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Wars, conflicts, business problems, church problems, family problems, personal problems, and spiritual problems are all ignited by the words that flow from the tongue.
- **Main Textual Discussion:** (1) James now moves from the image of a rudder to a match causing a fire. (2) It's an argument from the lesser to the greater. (3) In this case, the match has deadly consequences. (4) The tongue: (a) "corrupts the whole body" – what the tongue speaks projects what's inside (Luke 6:45); (b) "sets the course of one's life on fire" – the tongue is the major culprit to our paths not going in the direction we want; (c) "set on fire by hell" – it's the major tool in the devil's arsenal.
- **App:** Resolution of conflict always starts with taming the tongue. It may be the main tool in the devil's arsenal. But he didn't create it. God did.

Signs of Bridled Use of the Mandible

1. When blessings and blessings flow from the same bone.

- **The Power of Words that Flow from our Mouths Caught in Movies:** (1) Field of Dreams: "If you build it, he will come." (2) King Richard (Father of Venus and Serena Williams): "I don't have the next Michael Jordan. I have the next two Michael Jordans." (3) Chariots of Fire: "I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure."
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Praising God and cursing those who are created in his image is as common as breathing. But choose to speak praises and praises is rare and difficult...yet demanded.
- **Main Textual Discussion:** (1) Imago Dei – is Latin for the "image of God." (2) Literally: even though you can't see the face of God, you look in our faces and you'll have an idea of what he looks like it. (3) Therefore, praising God and cursing others is as to defame the face of God himself. That's why James has such a problem with it.
- **App:** Rain glows flowers. Not thunder. We learn that as parents. When we learn it in the church, it will start to resemble not just the face of God, but his countenance and character as well.

2. When the isolated bone recognizes it must dance with the others.

- **Little Family Dog vs Big Family Dog Training Difference Observation** (1) Big dogs, like German Shepherds, can be intimidating. But they are obedient when properly trained. (2) On the other hand, those little lap

dogs that people like to reach down and pet – like a Taco Bell Chihuahua – will tear your arm off. (3) The greatest task of the Chihuahua trainer is to teach little, sweet, and cuddly Cujo doesn't own the joint.

- **Main Idea of the Point:** If what should not be explains the situations we've caused for ourselves with the excessive use of the tongue, then what could be helps explain the conditions we can make for ourselves if we use it properly.
- **Main Textual Discussion** (1) The statement "what should not be" is demonstrated with a series of statements from nature about things out of their intended order (2) For example, Freshwater and saltwater can't flow from the same spring. When they do, they aren't refreshing (freshwater) or therapeutic (saltwater).
- **Conclusion:** So how do we get the mandible dancing with the other bones? By taming them: "those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity." (Prov 21:23). And using them the way God intended: Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen (Eph 4:29).