



[James 3:2-10](#)

(2) For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. (3) Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. (4) Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. (5) Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! (6) And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. (7) For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. (8) But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. (9) With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. (10) Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

New King James Version

For years, I read these scriptures, and I always thought, "I'm not starting forest fires with my words. I'm not viciously devouring people like a roaring beast. I can take this in stride and not worry so much about examining this. After all, these examples are for the extremes: the Adolf Hitlers, the serial criminal minds, the hardened and bitter sinners who retreat from humanity. This isn't me!"

[God](#) sometimes focuses our minds on the things we are guilty of by allowing us to experience the same behaviors from others. [David](#) did not see himself as he was behaving and affecting others until Nathan described to him another man's behavior ([II Samuel 12:1-4](#)). David was so outraged by the man's gross actions and attitude that he, as king, declared the death penalty on him (verses 5-6). Had this been an actual individual, chances are David would have pursued the matter to see the man brought to justice! However, the man he judged as worthy of death was none other than himself (verse 7).

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We experience similar lessons. We are at times brought into the company of people who are offensive to us, whose behavior hurts us, and whose words can cut us and wound us, because something in the experience will teach us what we need to learn. God is allowing us to experience ourselves.

We chuckle at times, observing how someone known for gossiping will howl in dismay when he is gossiped about, or how a person often critical of others is intolerant of criticism directed toward himself. We say about teasing, "Don't give it unless you can take it!" Similarly, we enjoy people who are warm and friendly, and we feel warm and friendly when we are around them. Happy people tend to attract other happy people, while bitter or angry people often find another unhappy person with whom they can share their complaints.

A deeper principle can be employed here: If we look at others' behaviors, we can learn to see ourselves. Job's friends had this opportunity. They saw Job going through his calamities, how miserable he was, and in their care for him, they did their best to find his fault and help him solve his dilemma. In the end, God simply dismissed these three friends and all their long-winded speeches because they failed to recognize the very thing God gave them opportunity to see: They failed to see themselves in Job.

Job was not singled out for this experience because he was Job. He represents mankind, blinded by himself and unable to see the reality of God. Even today, many centuries later, we examine the life and thoughts of Job in an effort to see ourselves in his shoes; we try to learn from his experience by exposing the same faults within us. This aids us by allowing us both to see what we might miss and to change what is incompatible with our Creator.

How often do these opportunities emerge for us to see ourselves in the actions of others? In the past decade, we have had many opportunities to witness the effects of deceitful men upon trusting and unsuspecting people. We have seen people shift allegiances and loyalties but deny doing so by their words. We have seen couples speak words of lifelong devotion only to cast them aside for a new attraction. We have seen friends and family who expressed the deepest of commitments to one another both deny those relationships and turn against one another. We have seen hearts broken by sarcasm and neglect. We have seen the crushing effects of criticism upon those needing reassurance and encouragement.

Most of us do not escape life without being deeply touched by such actions from others. But how incredibly sobering it is to see ourselves in these actions of others, to realize that we are guilty of the very things that may have hurt us deeply! We, too, are

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for James 3:2-10 (<http://www.theberean.org>) responsible for spreading the flames of a fire that devours and destroys all in its path. The evil of our tongues is as limitless as the evil James describes.

A sharp tongue is a weapon, no less as effective as a pointed spear or a sword honed to a razor's edge. A sharp tongue has no place among the [fruit of the Spirit](#) ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). It does not express [love](#), spread [joy](#) or promote [peace](#). It shows no [patience](#), [kindness](#) or [goodness](#) in its words. It betrays [faithfulness](#) and gentleness, and most of all, it shows no measure of self-control.

My sharp tongue has been a contradiction to the convictions I have expressed nearly all my life. I never saw it until I had to come face to face with the jabs, slices, and pricks of other sharp tongues, and to feel the fires they started within me. I would beg the Father for understanding, of why such communication should exist and why I should receive it with such bitterness—until I finally saw, as David did, that I am the guilty one.

— Staff

To learn more, see:

[Are You Sharp-Tongued? \(Part One\)](#)

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