

## Spiritual Maturity (6)

### Ponder: Controlling the Tongue

Scripture: “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” (James 3:2, NKJV).

I used to see a bumper sticker that said, “Start Brain Before Engaging Mouth.” Many are the times I’ve wished I’d done that!

James solemnly warned, “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless” (1:26). Just as we use a bridle and bit to control a horse, so we must “bridle” the tongue (i.e. exercise control over our speech).

No one said it would be easy! James himself mentioned the difficulty of controlling the words that come out of your mouth: “For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (3:7-8).

Samuel Ullman, a 19th-century poet, put it this way: “Maturity is the ability to think, speak, and act your feelings within the bounds of dignity. The measure of your maturity is how spiritual you become during the midst of your frustrations” (via brainyquote.com). That part about speaking really challenges us. In fact, controlling our speech is so difficult that James said anyone who doesn’t stumble in word “is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body” (3:2). “Perfect” doesn’t mean flawless, but complete or mature. Immature people speak before they think. They have not yet developed the self-discipline needed to bridle their tongue.

Solomon had much to say in Proverbs about our speech. For example, “The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness” (Prov. 15:2). There he contrasted the words of fools to wise speech. But the same principles hold true if we contrast mature to immature.

Jesus said, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). Even if you think before speaking, your words may be inappropriate if your heart is not right. Guard your heart and strive for spiritual maturity!

Song: “Angry Words”

Prayer: Eternal Father, please forgive us for the thoughts and words we have spoken that have offended You and hurt others. Help us, we pray, to become spiritually mature, to think before we speak, and to keep our hearts pure. In Jesus’ name, Amen.