



HOW CAN I CONTROL MY

tongue?

by Jan Brunette

ALL MY LIFE I HAVE BEEN PLAGUED

with a condition that I can't seem to rid myself of. No matter how many times I have worked really hard at it, it still rears its ugly head, and I pay the consequences for it days on end. Most of all, I live with the guilt of this condition and the hurt it may have caused others. I call this condition foot-in-mouth disease.

Maybe some of you join me in that condition. What we want to say comes out wrong. Or, in our anger, we say things hastily and regret ever having said them. If we offend someone in the process, we are reminded of the disease every time we see him or her. Sometimes without even being aware of it, unkind words pass on to others unintentionally. It's just part of who we are.

Then there is gossip. Oh, how often we can catch ourselves sharing the latest happenings at church or information about other members, especially if it includes something with which we don't agree. And before we know it, the story is shared with others — over and over. And like the old game of telephone, we often discover that the story we told has changed as many times as it has been passed along. And when we hear the final saga, we wonder how it could have gotten so distorted.

Preparation for Change

As we proceed through our study, we will use some verses of the song "Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing" as a prayer. (LSB #528; LW #276; TLH #360).

*Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace!*

*My gracious Master and my God,
Assist me to proclaim,
To spread through all the earth abroad,
The honors of Thy name.* (Verses 1–2)

Damage Control

Unfortunately, unlike these verses, our words are not always used to praise God. **James 3:2** makes that very clear to us. His words stab like a sharp finger pointing directly at us: *We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.*

Ouch! There are two key points that may lay a huge guilt trip on us: *never at fault in what he says* and *perfect*. Okay, Lord, we're already singled out on these two points. But James doesn't stop the pain there.

As we read **James 3:3–4**, we are now exposed to real examples of how something big can be steered and controlled by something much smaller. Name those examples. _____

How does James then relate them to the use of the tongue in **verses 5 and 6**? _____

What is the worst damage a tongue can do according to **verses 7–10**? Describe your feelings regarding your inability to control the tongue. _____

The apostle Paul also adds insult to injury as he addresses the helplessness of our sinful nature. As you read **Romans 7:18–23**, describe the struggle we encounter with the members of our body, including our tongues, versus our inner being, which is united with Christ. _____

The Clean-Up Process Begins

Does that mean we are forced to live with our recurring failures? Absolutely not! The joy of being united with Christ does not leave us to struggle alone with the process of controlling that tongue.

Read **Romans 7:25** and **8:1–2** to discover the redemption and renewal process. Share what it means to you to know that He will not leave you covered with the guilt of your bumbling tongue. _____

God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering for us. He lived a sinless life and willingly died for us so that we can now live in accordance with the Spirit and have our minds set on what the Spirit desires (**Romans 8:3–5**).

*Jesus! The name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life and health and peace.*

*He breaks the pow'r of canceled sin;
He sets the pris'ner free.
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood avails for me. (Verses 3–4)*

So how can we begin to allow that Spirit to have more control of the bits in our mouths and the rudders of our ships, that is, the members of our bodies? The foot-in-mouth disease has been there our entire lives, and we know it will rear its ugly head again. There must be some Scriptural relief and comfort for us. As you read the following verses, note the advice given.

1. Recognize that YOU cannot do it. It can be done in Christ's power alone.

John 15:5 _____

2 Peter 1:3 _____

2. Hear the absolution and the sermon. Receive the Lord's Supper in the Divine Service, where the sinner meets Jesus through the Means of Grace. Jesus locates Himself there to be used by the sinner, as He exposes and kills the Old Adam and makes alive the New Man's tongue. Christ's blood and body in the Holy Meal touch — and sanctify — the very member of the sinning, the tongue, as well as make holy the heart from where the tongue receives its unholy directives and impulses.

Hebrews 9:14 and 10:22 _____

James 1:17–18 _____

3. Ask for His control over your tongue.

John 15:7 _____

Psalms 141:3 _____

4. Think before you speak. Don't react verbally in haste. Be a positive example to others.

James 1:19 _____

Proverbs 10:19–21 _____

5. Draw closer to Christ through the study of His Word. Pray that your first focus in life will be to fix your eyes on Him, not on your feelings and emotions.

Hebrews 12:2 _____

Psalms 141:8 _____

6. Relying on Him, use your tongue, or refrain from using it, in the role of being a peacemaker.

Matthew 5:9 _____

James 3:17–18 _____

Clean-up Complete

7. And above all, understand that you are forgiven. Remember that He can use all things to strengthen us and bring about His glory, even our foot-in-mouth disease.

Romans 8:15–16, 28 _____

1 John 1:9 _____

Titus 3:4–7 _____

HOW WONDERFUL IT IS TO KNOW that the power of the cross and His redeeming grace have freed us to live a resurrected life in Him. While the sinful nature is still present, the power of the Holy Spirit through our Baptism is available, giving us the wisdom and guidance to change, along with the willingness to listen to His gentle reminders rather than to the “old man” within us. And even when we fall, Christ reminds us over and over in His Word that He has cleansed us and will use the mistakes for our good and His glory. The Father also will continue to forgive every time it occurs, as He knows the price His Son paid for those errors in judgment. So now, as His redeemed children, we can daily thank and praise God for giving us tongues to sing His praises — for His grace is available again and again and again.

Conclude by praying or singing:

*Look unto Him, ye nations; own
Your God, ye fallen race.
Look and be saved through faith alone,
Be justified by grace.*

*See all your sins on Jesus laid;
The Lamb of God was slain.
His soul was once an off'ring made
For ev'ry soul of man.*

*To God all glory, praise, and love
Be now and ever giv'n
By saints below and saints above,
The Church in earth and heav'n. Amen. (Verses 5–7)*

Jan Brunette is a Christian author, speaker, and freelance writer and has been an active member in the LWML for over forty years.

