

As I began to prepare this message, I was reminded of how as a child I would hear someone curse, and then someone nearby ask: “*Do you kiss your mother with that mouth?*” While posed as a question, it was a way of telling someone that their cursing was not any more welcome to them than it would be by their own mother. I was reminded of that because as we move on in our God Has An App For That worship series, we come to the spiritual app Dudley Rutherford titles “Curb Your Profanity.” As we begin to ponder this spiritual app I want to state, however, that God wants to do more through it than just help us stop cursing.

This is because the word “*profane*” (from which we get the word ‘profanity’) applies to more than just foul language. The word “*profane*” applies to all that “*is not sacred*” and all that is “*not respectful*,” and instead is “*abusive*” or “*degrading*.” This means that “Curb Your Profanity” is a spiritual app that is meant by God to help us see that it is His will that we should be “*perfect*” and “*never at fault*,” keeping our “*whole body*” (including our tongue) “*in check*.” This is especially important, James says, because the tongue can be a “*a world of evil among the parts of the body*.”

For this reason, Rutherford goes on to explain that James wrote what he did to warn us that if a person does not check their tongue, it can “*corrupt the whole person*,” that an unchecked tongue can set a person’s entire “*life on fire*,” and that if the tongue is not checked by a righteous heart and a holy mind, it can be “*set on fire by hell*” itself. This is because a person may think the incendiary things they are saying are only small sparks of sin, and don’t really matter that much, but those small sparks of sin can set ablaze a forest of trouble, pain, and difficulty - not only in the life of others, but also in the life of the person spewing those sparks. The reason for this is that when we allow any amount of evil to remain in our lives, we are not letting God’s grace envelop us. And when we don’t allow God’s grace to envelop us, we can “*praise our Lord and Father*” in one breath and “*curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness*” the next.

According to Rutherford, this is a life problem we need to deal with because God has told us through the Apostle James that for those who claim to “*have faith . . . THIS SHOULD NOT BE*.” For as a Christian, James says, God does not want us to be in a situation where “*out of the same mouth come [words of] praise*” and words that hurt people. To make that abundantly clear, James then asks, “*can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? Can a fig tree bear olives? Or a grapevine bear figs?*” The answer, of course, is NO. For if a person spews out sinful words (or their fingers type them on Facebook, on Twitter, or in texts), they are not being enveloped by God’s grace - as those things do not “*flow from the same spring*.”

To help us deal with this life issue, Rutherford therefore tells us in God Has an App For That to seek help from God in a manner similar to how a person downloads a computer app to write a letter or add numbers in spreadsheet. For to paraphrase what James said in last week’s passage, “*what good is it*” if we don’t curse but still gossip, “*what good is it*” if we don’t use foul words but still say things that hurt other people, and “*what good is it*” if the words that come out of our mouth sound righteous but are actually “*set on fire by hell*” and (as a result) set ablaze a forest of trouble, pain and difficulty - for others and for us. To seek God’s help, and become so enveloped by His grace that we are able to “*curb our profanity*,” Rutherford says there are a number of modules (to use another

computer term) we need to download.

According to Rutherford, one module we need to download to “curb our profanity” is to Prevent Forest Fires. By this statement, Rutherford tells us that one way God’s grace can help us overcome the profane ways we can be tempted to speak to - and about - other people is to give us the power to speak righteous words. This is because when we seek to have every word we speak be righteous, we reduce the risk of speaking incendiary words that can spread the fires of hell. We see this spoken to in many places in scripture. In Proverbs, for instance, we are told that “*gentle words bring life and healing*,” as well as “*kind words are like honey*.” In Ephesians, Paul tells us “*let no corrupting talk come out of your mouth, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear*.” And James says that “*if you claim to be religious but don’t control your tongue . . . your religion is worthless*.”

We see this spoken to in the reading before us from James when he wrote that “*we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us*,” that ships are “*steered by a very small rudder*,” and that “*the tongue is a small part of the body, but*” can set us in a righteous direction in how we speak to - and about - other people. But this is only true when we make sure our tongue (and our fingers on Facebook, on Twitter, and by text) utter only “*gentle*” and “*kind*” words - not just by refraining from foul language but - as Paul says - by having our words be “*for building up*.”

We see how this can work in real life in an ordination interview meeting I was in years ago. The candidate had several issues that indicated they were not likely to be approved at that time. But some members of the committee began to go overboard in their criticism, making it seem like the person would never be ordained - which is something no one has the ability to predict. So, after several people repeatedly rehashed reasons the candidate couldn’t be approved, I spoke up to say “*and on top of that, he put Nala in danger*.” Those with children, or at least had seen the Lion King, laughed. They realized that their tongues had begun to lag from “*building up*,” and we were able to move on to what needed to be said to the candidate. Which turned out to be good in the long run because the person was eventually ordained, and is now a good pastor.

According to Rutherford, another module we need to download to “curb our profanity” is to Deflate the Puffer Fish. By this statement, Rutherford tells us that another way God’s grace can help us overcome the profane ways we can be tempted to speak to - and about - other people is to give us the power to refrain from speaking conceited words. For when we seek to be humble, we reduce the risk of speaking haughty words that can spread the fires of hell. We see this spoken to in many places in scripture. In Proverbs, for instance, it says “*when pride comes, then comes disgrace*,” as well as “*a haughty spirit comes before a fall*.” In Philippians, Paul tells us to “*do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves*.” And James tells us that “*God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble*.”

We also see this spoken to in the reading before us from James when he wrote that “*the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts*,” and then explains how those ‘great boasts’ can cause spread the fires of hell in such a ways that they engulf not only other people, but also the one

doing the boasting. We see this in the fact that the Greek word for “*makes great boasts*” means to brag excessively or exaggerate to inflate a person’s ego. We also see this in Psalm 52 where King David wrote of those who spoke in such ways, saying “*why do you boast?*,” for in doing so “*your tongue plots destruction*” and leads a person to “*love evil rather than good.*”

We see how this works in real life in what is known as “revisionist history.” When a person untruthfully boasts long enough, they can come to believe their lies. When they spend too much time bragging about how great they are, they can come to believe they are great. And when they come to believe they are better than everyone else, it eventually seeps into every word they say.

A perfect example of this was when Notre Dame announced that the hiring of George O’Leary as their new football coach. 5 days after, O’Leary resigned because the press uncovered his lies. He had not been a football letterman. He did not have a Master’s Degree. And many of the achievements listed on his resume were - at the very least - inflated. But over the years, he had told those lies so many times, that he - and others - had come to believe them.

According to Rutherford, a final module we need to download to “curb our profanity” is to Put A Cork In It. By this statement, Rutherford tells us that another way God’s grace can help us overcome the profane ways we can be tempted to speak to - and about - other people is to give us the power to keep the evil inside us from coming out. This is because when we seek to speak righteous and humble words, the only way to do that is to sometimes stop saying anything.

We see this spoken to in many places in scripture. In Proverbs, for instance, we are told that “*sin is not ended by multiplying words; the prudent hold their tongues*” as well as “*the one who derides their neighbor has no sense, but the one who has understanding holds their tongue.*” In 1 Peter, the Apostle tells us “*do not repay evil with evil, or insult with insult.*” And James tells us that “*everyone should be quick to listen, [and] slow to speak.*”

We also see this spoken to in the reading before us from James when he wrote that “*we all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.*” But that is a big IF. None of us can say we are never at fault. None of us are able to keep our whole body in check - particularly our tongue. None of us are able to say that without God’s grace every word that comes out of our mouths is righteous. Which is why the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans that “*there is no one righteous, not even one,*” and that everyone’s “*tongues practice deceit.*”

We see how this works in real life in a meeting I was in at a church I served. As we discussed a problem, one person kept complaining about those who had caused the problem. After doing so several times, this person took one more shot at steering the discussion. “*I know I shouldn’t say this but,*” they said. But then they paused. And they paused because they made eye contact with me. Which created an issue for them because I had just preached on speaking in holy ways, and had said in that sermon “*so if you find yourself saying ‘I know I shouldn’t say this, but’ . . . close your mouth and don’t say anything.*” As a result, in the longest three seconds I have ever experienced, the

enveloping grace of God descended on this person's heart, and they decided to allow God to help them PUT A CORK IN IT, saying "*never mind; I'll just stop talking.*"

We live in a world where profanity has become common, and not just through curse words and foul language. In his book, Rutherford writes that as a result "*we hear demeaning and abusive language used in everyday conversation,*" and also that this 'demeaning and abusive language' "*makes comedic hay out of other's misfortunes.*" What's worse, Rutherford writes, "*I don't just hear this type of language in the media; I hear it from people who call themselves Christians.*" As a comment of lament, he asks "*have we not realized that the gift of language was created with the best of God's intentions? With our words, we are able to paint beautiful pictures, tell colorful stories, build others up . . . and express love.*" But, he laments, all too often we fallen and sinful creatures fail to use language only to "*build up*" and "*give grace,*" and instead "*stumble in many ways.*"

Fortunately, God has told us through the Apostle James that we do not have to live this way. If we allow His grace to fully envelop us, can grow closer with each passing day to having our tongue be "*perfect*" and "*never at fault,*" and kept "*in check.*" For if we are growing in that way, our religion will move from being "*worthless*" to being of tremendous value - not only to us but to those around us as we share with them through our loving words the love of the one true righteous WORD of God, Jesus Christ our Lord.