

## THE DISCIPLINE OF THE TONGUE: BE SLOW TO SPEAK

(James 3:1-12)

Series: The Disciplines of a Godly Life (Part 6)

...The ability to speak is a wonderful thing, and by the use of syntax and grammar mankind stands at the pinnacle of God's creation. Language makes possible the clearest level of understanding, the conserving and passing on knowledge from the past, and the sharing of thoughts and feelings between one another. (Kent)

...Like many good things, words can also have a very dark side. All of us know too well that speech can injure either through poor communication, inaccurate information, or the deliberate desire to harm others with one's tongue.

...Pastor James, Jesus' brother, was the pastor at the church of Jerusalem and wrote to his congregation unfolding the truth that "Faith alone saves," and that genuine faith will transform our speech.

### TWO CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TONGUE WARNING YOU TO EXERCISE DISCIPLINE IN YOUR USE OF IT.

...For the misuse of the tongue is probably the easiest way to sin, because there are no built-in restraints.

#### I. Your Tongue, In Spite of Its Small Size, Has Great Power. (vv.1-5a)

- A. James began with a warning to teachers, be careful with your teaching (words) for God will hold you to a higher standard at the judgment. A teacher influences the lives of his hearers.
  - 1. Matthew 12:36-37, if every "idle word," how much more the teacher and his words.
  - 2. Remember, that we are all still in sin and sin. (3:2) "We all stumble..." So the potential for error is ever present.
  - 3. A spiritually mature person can be recognized by their words. If their words are filled with praise, gratitude, and encouragement then you know their heart is right and under the control of the Holy Spirit.
- B. James gives us 2 examples illustrating the power of the tongue. (vv.3-5a)
  - 1. Horses are controlled by a small bit and bridle placed over their tongue.  
...James is not thinking of a broken down farm horse, but a prancing warhorse.  
...A horse may weigh 1000 pounds and yet can be directed by...
  - 2. Ships were the largest man-made vehicles in that day, and yet are controlled by a rudder.  
This large vessel is guided even through strong winds by a little "paddle."
- C. James provides the application for us in verse 5. Your tongue, though a small member of your body, exercises a power far out of proportion to it's size.
  - 1. Never doubt the power of the tongue and never underestimate it...
  - 2. The reality is that over the long haul we are known by the way we talk. Others will like us or not, largely by what our tongues produce. Great power!

#### II. Your Tongue, If Unleashed, Can Do Great Damage. (vv.5b-12)

- A. Our tongues are likened to fire, as both can destroy. (Think: Chicago fire, 1871)
  - 1. Fire has the ability to multiply and spread itself, unlike water. Destroys all in its path.
  - 2. The tongue destroys through hateful, false, or careless words. Elsewhere the Bible tells, "The tongue has the power of life and the power of death." Death words!!!  
...The source of its poison is a pipeline from "hell." (v.6) Satan himself...

- B. Our words harm others because they are untamable apart from Christ and simply reveal our sinful hearts. Jesus told us this in Matthew 12:33-34.
1. A person's heart is his storehouse, and his words indicate what is stored there.
  2. We are able to "tame" all sorts of animals, but not the tongue. (vv7-8)  
...Not domesticate, but subdue wild animals. We put animals in zoos, not vice versa.
  3. Our only hope for a godly tongue is for God's Spirit to first do a work in our hearts, by New Birth and the daily walking in the Spirit. Impossible otherwise!!!
- C. Our words can damage through inconsistent usage. (vv.9-12) "Blessings and cursing???"  
..."This ought not be so." (v.10) Such a thing is contrary to nature. Yet a big problem for us!
1. We bless and praise the Lord. This is right and beautiful. It is only fitting.
  2. Then, the next moment, curse one made in God's likeness and image. Evil!
  3. This inconsistency is contrary to nature and indicates a heart problem.

## SO WHAT? WHAT DIFFERENCE SHOULD THIS MAKE IN MY LIFE?

1. First we need to ask the Lord to cauterize our lips, confessing as Isaiah did, "Woe unto me...I am ruined. A man of unclean lips." (Isa 6:5) Pray, Lord Jesus please forgive me for my words and cleanse me.
2. Then daily pray: "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips." (Psalm 141:3) Pray with David, "May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)
3. Ask the Lord to help you use your tongue to always edify others with words of blessing, encouragement, and grace. Use your words to tell others the "good news of salvation." Fill your heart full of God's wonderful Word and when you speak it will come out and bless those who hear.
4. Perhaps your words indicate that you are not saved, and still lost in your sin. Not that Christians don't fail in their tongue usage, we do, but to habitually spew evil-poisonous words indicates the lack of genuine saving faith. Today call upon Jesus as Savior and Lord and He will save you from sin and its penalty.